This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

WE THREE

GOUVERNEUR MORRIS

WE THREE

"Dark against the light illumination of the hall stood Lucy Fulton."

[PAGE 72.]

WE THREE

BY

GOUVERNEUR MORRIS

AUTHOR OF "THE SEVEN DARLINGS," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
HENRY HUTT

NEW YORK
PUBLIC
LIBRARY

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK LONDON
1916

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
574624 A
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R 1932 L

COPYRIGHT, 1916, BY
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

COPYRIGHT, 1915, 1916, BY THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE COMPANY

Printed in the United States of America

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

"Dark against the light illumination of the hall stood Lucy Fulton" . . . *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

"They met with an honest kiss, like lovers long parted" 34

"It's what you and I stood up and promised before a lot of people" 104

" 'You are all that counts . . . you know that' " 208

31X685

WE THREE

I

WHEN I know that Lucy is going to Palm Beach for the winter I shall go to Aiken. When I know that she is going to Aiken, I shall go to Palm Beach. And I shall play the same game with Bar Harbor, Newport, Europe, and other summer resorts. So we shall only meet by accident, and hardly ever. We've been asked not to.

But I ought to begin further back. It would do no harm to begin at the beginning. There is even a king's advice to that effect. Said the king in "Alice," "Begin at the Beginning, go on to the End, and then stop."

In the beginning, then: When I was a little boy, old enough to be warned against playing with matches, I began of course to think them desirable playthings, and whenever I got a chance played with them. And I never:

(1) Set myself on fire,

(2) Nor anybody else,

(3) Nor the house in which my parents lived with me.

And yet I had been told that I should do all of these things; not often perhaps, but certainly every once in a while.

Of course it *is* possible to do all sorts of things with a match. You may light it and blow it out, for instance. Lighted, you may put it in your mouth without burning yourself. And if you do this in the dark, the light will shine through your cheek, and if you are a fat child you will give the impression of a Hallowe'en lantern carved from a pumpkin. Or you may light the butt of your father's cigar and learn to smoke. It is one of the cheapest ways. Or you may set fire to the lower edge of the newspaper which your grandfather is reading in the big arm-chair by the window, and I guarantee that you will surprise him. Here is an interesting play: Light a match, blow it out, and, while the end is still red hot, touch the cook firmly on the back of the neck. If she has been reading Swinburne she will imagine that she has been kissed by a policeman. When she finds out that she hasn't she will be disappointed, and perhaps you will be disappointed, too. Oh, a

match is a wonderful thing, even the wooden ones that are made on earth! You may burn a whole city to the ground. And once, I am told, there was a man who lighted a match and fired a cannon that was heard around the world.

To play with matches is one thing: to play with the fire that you have lighted, or helped light, is another. And it was not until I played with fire that I did any real harm in this world (that I know about). Playing with fire I singed a moth; I singed a butterfly, and I burnt a man.

If this was just the story of my own life I wouldn't be so impertinent as to hope that it would be interesting to anybody. It isn't my story, and no matter how much I may seem to figure in it, I am neither its hero, nor, I think, the god who started the machinery.

Thirty-five years ago I took to live with me a middle-aged couple, who had begun to fear that they were going to die without issue. Though I say it that shouldn't, I was very good to them. I let them kiss me and maul me from morning till night. Later, when I knew that it was the very worst thing in the world for me, I let them spoil me as much as they wanted to. They even gave

me the man's name, without my consent, and I didn't make a row. But I *did* lift my head with sufficient suddenness and violence to cause the Bishop of New York to bite his tongue, and to utter a word that is not to be found in the prayer book. I was christened Archibald Mannering Damn.

But I have never used the surname with which the good Bishop so suddenly and without due authorization provided me. Certain old friends, acquainted with the story, do not always, however, show my exquisite taste and reticence in this matter. Only the other day in the Knickerbocker Club I overheard some men talking. And one of them, in a voice which I did not care for, said "Archibald Mannering—damn!" And conveyed without other word or qualification than the tone of his voice, that he had very little use for me. Well, I can thank God for putting into the world some other people who have not that man's clearsightedness and excellent powers for passing judgment upon his fellow men.

So the man gave me his name and took other liberties with me, and the woman gave me her watch to break (I broke it) and took other liberties, and

a second woman who called herself Nana took still other liberties with me—liberties which made me furiously angry at the time, and which even now would make me blush.

Sometimes I was sorry that I had taken the man and the woman to live with me. At times they bored me. They seemed to me intelligent, and I had to choose my words carefully, and talk down to them as to a pair of children. But I got used to them gradually. And I got to like them, especially the woman. I even formed the habit of forgiving her things offhand without being asked to—Oh, my dear parents, I am only trying to poke a little fun at you! And you weren't middle-aged when you came to live with me. I only imagine that you must have seemed so to a baby whose eyes had only just come undone. Thirty-five years have rolled by—bringing, taking, and, alas! leaving behind them cares and vicissitudes, and still you seem no more than middle-aged to me. You, father, with your fine, frank weather-beaten face of a county squire with the merry smile and the wit which makes you so welcome wherever you go, even those ghosts of sorrow deep in your eyes don't make you look more than middle-aged. And yet I think no hour of your life passes in which you don't

recall, with a strangling at your throat, how my little sister, Pitapat, came in from the garden drooping, to you, almost always to you, when she was in trouble, and climbed and was lifted into your lap, and cuddled against you—Oh, I can't write the rest. But I tell you that I, too, sir, have recalled little Pitapat, and how she died, all on a summer's day, in her "Dada's" arms, and that the thought of what she was to you, and what such another child might be to such another man, has twisted even my tough entrails, and caused me for once, at least, to draw back from a piece of easy and enticing mischief, and play the man.

And you, mother, with your face of a saint, haven't I always poked fun at you? You don't look more than middle-aged either. You look less. And yet you too have your sorrow that never dies. For you were fitted to be a mother of men, and you have brought into the world only a lovely flower that soon withered away, and a Butterfly.

I don't call myself a Butterfly from choice. I only do it because I'm trying to be honest, and I think that it's just about what I am. But do we really know what a butterfly is? Have we given that ornamental (though I say it—that shouldn't) and

light-minded (though I say it with shame) and light-hearted (though the very lightest of hearts must weigh *something*, you know) insect a square deal? I confess that only a light-hearted insect would perpetrate such a sentence as the foregoing; but wouldn't it be fun if, when the whole truth comes to be known about butterflies, we found them more or less self-respecting, more or less monogamous, occasionally ratiocinative, carelessly kind, rather than light-hearted creatures, and not insects, in the accepted sense, at all? It would surprise me no more to learn that an insect was really a man, than that a man, even so great and thinking a man as Mr. Bryan for example, was an insect.

If the butterfly at lunch flits from flower to flower; and the butterfly at play flits from butterfly to butterfly; so then may the butterfly (at what he is pleased to call his work) flit from theme to theme, from subject to subject, from character to character, from plot to counterplot, and crosswise and back again. If more autobiographists realized how many difficulties may be avoided in this way, far fewer autobiographists would be heroes and many, many more would be butterflies.

II

EVEN before I was born the richer people of New York did not inhabit that city the year round, but their holiday excursions were far shorter than now, both in distance and duration. To escape the intenser heats of summer the moneyed citizen of those days sent his family to the seaside for six weeks or to the mountains. Later his family began to insist that it must also be spared the seasons of intense cold. And nowadays there are families (and the number of these increases by leaps and bounds) who if they are not allowed to escape from everything which seems to them disagreeable or difficult, get very down in the mouth about it. Even the laboring classes are affected. The rich man wishes to live without any discomfort whatever, and the poor man wishes to live without doing any work whatever. That, I think, is at the root of their most bloody differences of opinion, for the poor man thinks that the rich man ought to be uncomfortable, and the rich man thinks that the poor man ought to work. And they will never be in agreement.

Given enough money it becomes easier and easier to run from one difficulty or discomfort into another. And even the laborer finds it continually easier to make a living without earning it.

When I was a little boy, Newport and Bar Harbor were a long way from New York. To Europe was a real voyage; while such places as Palm Beach and Aiken were never mentioned in polite society, for the simple reason that polite society had never heard of them. But nowadays it is not uncommon for a man to have visited all these places (and some of them more than once) in the course of a year. Europe which was once a foreign country is now but as a suburb of New York. And I myself, I am happy to say, have been far oftener in Paris than in Brooklyn.

The modern butterfly thinks little of flying out to Pittsburg or Cleveland or St. Louis for a dance or a mere wedding. He attends athletic events thousands of miles apart, and knows his way from the front door to the bar and card room of every important club between the Jockey Club in Paris and the Pacific Union in San Francisco, excepting, of course, those clubs in his own city to which he does not happen to belong.

My father, because of my little sister's fragility, was one of the first men I know to make a practice of going South for the winter, and to Long Island for the spring and autumn. In summer we went to Europe or Bar Harbor, for with justice he preferred the climate of the latter to that of Newport or Southampton. We were less and less in our town house, and indeed so jumped about from place to place, that although my mother succeeded in making her other houses easy and indeed charming to live in, I have never known what it was to have a home. And indeed I cannot at this moment call to mind a single New York family of the upper class that lives in a home.

My mother is old-fashioned. She would have preferred to live in one place the year around, to beautify and to ennoble that place; to be buried from it as she had been married into it, and to leave upon it the stamp of her character, incessant industry and good taste; to fill it gradually with the things she loved best or admired most, and to be always there, ready for the children or the grandchildren to come home.

But she gave up this ambition at a hint of delicacy in a child's face, and a note of anxiety in a husband's

voice, and took to packing trunks to go somewhere, and unpacking them when they arrived. Of course she couldn't do this to all of them, for we moved with very many, but there were certain ones to which she would let nobody put hand but herself—my father's, my sister's, mine, and her own. And you always knew that if you had accidentally left letters and notes in your pockets that you didn't want seen, they wouldn't be.

My father would almost abuse her for doing so much work with her own hands, and for always being up so early, but in secret he was very proud of her; and to see her dressed for the dance or the opera, eager and gay as a girl, slender and beautiful, her head very high and fearless, you would have thought that she had never done anything in all her life, but be pampered and groomed and sheltered.

Upon one good old-fashioned custom they were in firm agreement. They always slept in the same bed; they do still. And they will lie in the same grave.

Whichever home it was that we happened to be inhabiting, unless out of season because of my sister, it was always pretty well filled with people. My father loved people, and my mother got to love them

for his sake. For my part, until very recently, I have always hated to be alone. Flint is a gloomy solitary, but when he meets with Steel there are sparks.

I suppose there are brooding lovers of knowledge in this world who are fonder of their own than of any other company. But most people can only think half thoughts and need other people to complete them. It is amusing enough to knock a ball against a wall, and a wonderful help in the perfection of strokes, but it is far more amusing to face somebody across a net and play lawn tennis.

My father and mother always hoped that I would be a great man, and even now they hope that I may one day turn over a new leaf. Unfortunately there was no greatness in me, and as for those leaves of my life which I have not yet read, they are uncut, and I am always mislaying the paper knife. And whether the matter on the next leaf or the one after will be new or not, is for the future to know. You cannot, I think, teach a child to grow great.

But you can teach a child to dance and swim and shoot and sail, and to ride and to be polite, and to keep clean, and by example rather than precept, to be natural and unaffected! It was hoped then that

I would be a great man; in the event, however, of my turning out to be nothing but a butterfly, I was brought up to be as ornamental a butterfly as possible. I cannot remember when I wasn't being prepared and groomed to take, without awkwardness, a place in society.

Well-bred grown-ups talk to children, without affectation or condescension, as if they too were grown-ups. My parents were always entertaining people, and it was assumed without comment that I too was host no less than they. Twice a day I had to be in evidence: at tea time, face and hands shining clean, hair carefully brushed, my small body covered with crisp white duck, black silk stockings on my legs, and patent leather pumps on my feet. No conversation was required of me, but if I had forgotten a name and the face that went with it, I was allowed to feel uncomfortable; allowed to feel as a grown man feels when he has accidentally said something that would better have been left unsaid. It was my duty to go accurately from guest to guest, to shake hands, and to say perfectly naturally not "Hunh!" as so many modern children do, but "How do you do, Mrs. Lessing," or "How do you do, Mrs. Green," and not to stare and fidget or be awkward.

Then I had my tea, discolored hot water with sugar and cream, my buttered toast, and a bit of cake. After that my mother would make it exceedingly easy for me to get away. My second public appearance was just before dinner. Then, dressed once more in white and patent leather, I came to the drawing-room to wish and be wished good night.

To obey my mother, when there was no real temptation to disobey her, was very easy, and nobody ever saw me look sulky or balky when I was told to do this or that. It was easy to obey her, because from the first, she took it absolutely for granted that she was going to be obeyed. Of course it was different with general orders designed to cover long periods of time, for here the tempter had his chance at me, and I was forever falling. "Stop kicking the table leg, Archie," is an order easily and instantly obeyed. For "Never kick a table," I cannot say the same. I used to divide her orders into two classes: The now nows and the never nevers. The latter were mostly beyond me. Though you may halt one sinner in the act of throwing a stone at another, there is little reason to believe that he will not soon be trying his aim again.

I like children when they are polite and a little

reticent, when they are not too much in evidence, and when the whole household is not made to revolve about them.

Fulton once said to me, in that shy yet eager way of his: "If only I could arrest my babies' development; keep them exactly as they are; on tap when I wanted them, and hibernated like a couple of little bears when I was busy and mustn't be disturbed! They should never change, while I lived, if I had my way. And I'd promise not to abuse my privileges. I'd only take 'em out of the ice box when I absolutely needed them and couldn't do without them."

It was the first time that I ever was in the Fulton house that he said that. The two babies, a boy and a girl, Jock and "Hurry," two roly-polies, with their mother's eyes and mischievous smile, had been brought in to the tea table to be polite and share a lump of sugar. And they had been very polite, and had shown the proper command over their shyness, and had shaken me decorously by the hand, and made their funny grave little bows and asked me how I did. And I had said something in praise of the little girl to her face, and Fulton had reproached me a little for doing so.

"In India," he had said, "it is very bad luck to praise a child to its face, very bad luck indeed."

"I'm so sorry," I said, when the children had gone. "I ought to have remembered that even very little babies in the cradle understand everything that's said to them. May I praise them now? Because they are the two most delicious babies in the world. I'd like to eat them."

"When I'm tired or worried," said Fulton, his eyes lighting with tenderness, "Hurry always knows. And she comes and climbs into my lap and leans against me without saying a word, and she keeps creepy-mouse still until she knows that I'm feeling better. Then she chuckles, and I hug her. Sometimes I wish that she was made like a tennis ball; then I could hug her as hard as I wanted to without hurting her."

While he was speaking, Mrs. Fulton looked all the time at her husband's face. I remember thinking, "God! If ever some woman should look at me like that!" Her mouth smiled mischievously, just the way little Hurry's smiled, and her eyes—I won't try to describe the love and tenderness that was in them, nor the dog-like faithfulness—were eyes that prayed. And they were the deepest, most brilliant

blue—like those Rheims windows that the Beast smashed the other day. She laughed and said: "Hurry and her father don't care about each other —not *at* all."

Fulton lifted his eyes to hers and it was as if "I *love* you" flashed from each to the other in that crumb of time. His face reddened a little, and hers became more rosy. They weren't a bit ashamed of being obviously in love with each other. I think they rather prided themselves on it.

"Why *Hurry?*" I asked. "Is it a real name? Of course I remember Hurry Harry in Cooper——"

"Her real name is Lucy," said Fulton, "same as her Mumsey, but they look so ridiculously alike that I was afraid I'd get 'em mixed up. And so we call her Hurry, because she always hurries; she hurries like mad. Same as her Mumsey."

"Do you," I asked, "hurry like mad?"

She gave a comical hurried nod that made me laugh right out, and Fulton said:

"She has smashed the more haste the less speed fallacy all to pieces." You could see that the man was glowing with pride. And he began to boast about her, and though she tried to stop him, she couldn't help looking perfectly delighted with her-

self, like some radiant child in the new dress for the party.

When Fulton had finished his eulogy, a long one, filled with humor, character drawing, and tenderness—something in his voice rather than his words, perhaps, always gave people the feeling that he had a wonderfully light touch, and a point of view at once sentimental and humorous—I reproached him, in turn, for praising a child to her face.

"In India," I said, "it's considered beastly unlucky."

Mrs. Fulton sprang to his defense. "I'm not a child," she defied me, "I'm a married woman."

They took me to the front door themselves, and watched me as far as the gate. I know this, because although I did not look back, it was when I reached the gate that I heard the door close, and I thought: "*Now* if I looked back, and the door was transparent, I'd see a pretty picture. It's a thousand to one shot that he's caught her in his arms and is kissing her and that she's perfectly delighted."

III

IT is not easy for me to keep away from Lucy Fulton either on paper or in real life. The latter I have to do, for I think that I am able to keep a promise, and I ought to do the former as much as I can, if I am to tell her story and her husband's and my own in their true proportions. Otherwise we should but appear as one of those "eternal triangles" to which so much of French dramatic genius has been devoted; whereas it appears to me, though not, I am afraid, to Fulton, that if our relations to each other could be symbolized by a figure, that figure would not be a triangle; but a cross, let us say, between a triangle and a square.

Fulton and I are the same age. We were in the same class at Mr. Cutter's school for a year or two, and were quite friendly at times. But except that we both collected postage stamps, we had no tastes in common. It is almost enough to say that he was full of character and reserve, and that I was unstable and kept the whole of my goods displayed in the shop window. I cannot imagine thirteen-year-

old Fulton in love with fifteen-year-old Nell or Nancy, but I was frequently in love with both at the same time, or so fancied myself, and, almost consciously, as it seems, he was conserving his powers of loving for the one great passion of his life, when he should give all that a man may have in him of purity and faith and purpose. But when my time for a great passion came, though I gave all that I had to give, it is true, still that *all* was not the whole that I might have had; it was only all that was left, all that had not already been given. But there was enough at that to hurt and do harm.

Fulton was studious and enamored of knowledge for its own sake. I was lazy and only interested in such pieces of knowledge as I felt might be of use to me. But we both stood well in our classes; he because he had brains and knew how to use them, and I because the Lord had gifted me with a capital sight memory.

Perhaps I should do better to state who our intimates were in those days, and what has become of them. Fulton's most intimate friend was a boy named Lansing, who made a practice of cutting open dead things to see what was inside of them. Today

Lansing (of course that's not his real name) is so great a surgeon that even the man in the street knows him by sight. My most intimate friend was Harry Colemain, and we were mixed up in all sorts of deviltries together. To me he has been always a faithful friend and a charming companion, but of his career, what can I say that is really pleasant? Nothing, unless I modify each statement by pages of explanation and reminiscence. As he danced the old dances, so he dances the new, to greater perfection than any man in New York. He is gorgeously built, and has a carriage of the head, an eye and a smile, and a way with him that can shake a man from the water wagon or a woman from her virtue. He smokes like a factory, and drinks like a fish, yet at a moment's notice he is ready for some great feat of endurance—such as playing through the racket championship, or swimming from Newport to Narragansett Pier. He might have been—anything you please. But what can I say definitely that he *is?* Well, at this very moment, he is co-respondent in a divorce suit which is delighting the newspapers, and it looks as if he'd have to marry her in the end. And that's a pity because they were tired of each other before they got found out, and she's

not the kind of woman that his friends are going to like.

Fulton's friend Ludlow has just published the best book on the birds of New York, past and present, that was ever written. My friend Pierson died the other day of pneumonia. As a boy he had the constitution of an ox, and ought to have thrown off pneumonia as I would throw off a cold in the head, but the doctors say that he had simply burned up his powers of resistance with overdoses of alcohol. You never saw him drunk or off his balance or merry in any way; he simply and slowly soaked himself till his insides were like sponges dipped in the stuff. And Pierson's not the only man in my circle who has gone out like that; and as they went so will others go; strong and well Saturday to the casual eye, and dead Monday.

This is not the time to take up those great issues which have risen between those who are tempted by drink and fall, and those who are not tempted and don't. But I am very sure of this: that a vast majority of the men who make the world go round drink or have drunk; and that when at last the world comes to be governed by those who don't and haven't, it will be even worse governed, more pettily

and meddlesomely, than it is at present. And that is saying a good deal, even for a butterfly.

You mustn't gather that Fulton and his friends were a goody-goody set of boys. They erred and strayed from their ways at times, like the worst of us. There was Browning for instance, a born experimenter, who so experimented with cocktails one fine morning (at the corner of Sixth Avenue and Forty-third Street) that he marched into Madame Castignet's French class, drunk as a lord, full of argument, and was presently expelled from the school. It was commonly said that the disgrace of it would hound him through life. Far from it! Those who at this day pack Carnegie Lyceum to hear him play the violin, and who listen, laughing and crying, and comparing him to the incomparable Kreisler, perceive no disgrace in that youthful episode, rather they see in it an early indication of the divine temperament trying to shake off its fetters and be free.

One boy that I went to school with is on the famous Meadowbrook team; another has played in Davis Cup matches; another brought home a First from the Olympic games. In the pack that I run with there is even one Roper who achieves a large

income by writing fiction for the magazines, but even he isn't in the least like that brilliant little circle to which Fulton belonged. For we feel that we are paying him an immense compliment when we say, "Would you ever suspect that he was an author?" Good at games, fond of late hours and laughter, with the easiest and most affectionate good manners, he is quite convinced, if you can get him to talk shop at all, that art for art's sake is bunk, and that there is more amusement and inspiration to be had on Bailey's Beach and in the Casino at Newport than in the whole of Italy.

I must set Roper off against Fulton's friend Garrick. Poor Garrick slaved and slaved and reached after perfection. Some say that in the thin little volume that he succeeded at last in getting published, and leaving behind for the delight of posterity, he actually touched perfection. Perhaps he did. I don't know. But I do know this: that he had enough talent and energy to make a living, and didn't. That he loved his art more than his wife and family, and that they all starved together. Is it worse to starve your family for love of liquor than for love of art? Roper loves his liquor but he fights against it and makes a handsome income; Garrick gave himself up

body and soul to his love for art, and if it wasn't for his friends Mrs. Garrick would be working in a sweatshop.

Fulton and I discussed him once (when I was going to the Fulton house a good deal), but we had to give it up as a topic. Fulton saw something fine and generous in the man, and could not speak of him without emotion, while I found it impossible to speak of him without contempt.

Fulton himself fell away from his friends in later years, not spiritually but physically. Lucy Fulton simply had to go on living among the people with whom she had been brought up, and in the manner to which she was accustomed; and Fulton seeing her pine and grow sorrowful in other conditions, and bored and fretful, gradually fell into her ways and wishes, as a gentleman shouldn't (but does always), and made his new friends among those who are born to be amused. Her love and happiness were far more important to him than changed ways and the injured feelings of old friends. Once he talked to me about this (for we grew quite intimate). I remember he said:

"Somehow I don't seem to see my old friends any more or keep up with them. If anything hap-

pened to Lucy, I'd be absolutely alone in the world, except for the babies. A man does wrong to drift away from those who he knows by a thousand proofs care for him, on any pretext or for any cause."

And yet he had come to wear the hallmarks of the pack, and to talk the language of the world that only asks to be happy and amused. He took to games seriously and played them well, and you couldn't point to him as one of those cautious persons who never by any chance drank even one cocktail too many. Indeed, he often became hilarious and witty, and added no end to the gayety of occasions, and was afterward privately reproached by Lucy. Coming from another, the hilarity and wit would have rejoiced her, but, coming from her nearest and dearest, her mind narrowed, and the cold fear that women have of liquor possessed her.

To me it has always been comical, even when I didn't feel well myself, to see the husbands come into the club after a big night; each wearing upon his face, as plainly as if they had been physical scratches, the marks of the wifely tears which he had been forced to witness, and of the reproaches which he had been forced to hear, and yet each trying to look as if he was the master of his own house and his

own destiny. No well-born woman, however cold and calculating, can silently put up with her husband's drinking, yet how easily she overlooks it in any other man! How many excuses she will find for him:

"Why, he's quite wonderful! Of course I knew at once that he was tipsy, but he was perfectly sensible —perfectly."

If men didn't drink, women wouldn't have so many parties to go to or so much money to spend. How many teetotalers let their wives spend them into ruin and disgrace? It is the drinking American who indulges his wife and lets her make a fool of herself and him. It's his unconfessed, and perhaps unadmitted, remorse seeking a short cut to forgiveness.

It seems that I played too much pool and billiards for a small boy; and got into too much city mischief, for I learned at the end of a delightful Newport summer that I was to finish my schooling, not at Mr. Cutter's, but at Groton.

IV

IN those Groton days I let matches strictly alone; I neither played with them, nor used them to light cigarettes with. I was vaguely ambitious to be great and splendid, and I was down on purposeless boys who didn't behave themselves.

Lucy's brother was in my form. She used to come to visit him, with her parents, in their car. Even for Groton parents the Ludlows were enormously rich, or if they weren't enormously rich, they were enormous spenders.

Lucy was seven years our junior, but even in those baby days she had the laughing mouth and the praying eyes that were to play such havoc later on. She was a child of the world; natural, straightforward, and easy-going.

Lucy at nine was so pretty, so engaging, and had so much charm and magnetism that I remember having regretted, very solemnly, and with youthful finality, that we did not belong to the same generation. I was sorry that she was not fifteen or sixteen like myself; so that I could be in love with her and she with me!

Once Lucy was so sick that they thought she was going to die, and Schuyler was called home from school. The whole school was affected, so strong and vivid was its memory of an engaging and fearless child. I remember being sorrier than ever that I had been confirmed into a system which makes disease contagious instead of health, and asking one of the masters how he reconciled the death of a kid like that, whom everybody loved, with his conception of an all-wise and all-merciful God. He answered, it has always seemed to me very lamely, that if we didn't believe that all was for the best, in this best of all worlds, we should never get anywhere.

All for the best! If we are to forgive the Power that sets him on, why not the murderer himself who does the real dirty work? If *all* is for the best, so then must the component parts of all (each and every) be for the best. In short we can do no wrong in this best of worlds. Oh, what grim, weak-minded nonsense they prate and preach!

There was hand-clapping when the Rector told us that Schuyler Ludlow's little sister was going to get well, and presently Schuyler returned to school somewhat self-important, as becomes one who has sat at

meat with famous doctors, and talked of them *in extremis*.

The first time I rode with Lucy through the Aiken woods, I recalled this famous illness of hers, and I think it had something to do with all that happened afterward.

We had lost ourselves, a little, as you do at Aiken, among the infinity of sand trails beyond the Whitney drive. We knew where *we* were, of course, and we knew where Aiken was, but every trail that started toward it fetched up short with a wrong turning. It was one of those bright hot days in late February, when a few jasmine flowers have opened, and you are pretty sure that there won't be any more long spells of rain or freezing cold. Even Lucy, who loved riding, was content to sit a walking horse, and bask in the sunshine.

I mentioned her famous illness, and she remembered nothing about it. "I'm always too busy," she said, "with what's going on right now to remember things."

"Why," I said, "Schuyler was sent for, and you were given up half a dozen times. Don't you really remember at all?"

"They wouldn't have told me I was being given

up right and left, would they? Probably it didn't hurt much, and I was given a great many presents. It seems to me I do remember one particularly great time of presents, when lots of old gentlemen came to see me."

"I hoped you'd remember better," I said; "because at the time it seemed to me one of the most important things that had ever happened in the world."

Lucy listened eagerly. She didn't in the least mind a conversation that was all about herself.

"The whole school," I said, "was touched with solemnity. Now you wouldn't take me for a praying man, would you?"

"I don't know. Wouldn't I?"

"Whether I am or not," I said, "doesn't matter now, because I have so little to pray for. But at that time I went down on my knees and prayed that you'd get well."

"You were very fond of Schuyler, weren't you?"

"And am. But that wasn't the reason. I don't know just what the reason was. Maybe I was looking forward to this ride, and didn't want to miss it! I was ashamed to be seen praying, so I prayed in bed. But I was afraid that wouldn't do any good, so

when my roommate had gone to sleep I got up in the dark and went down on my marrowbones on the bare icy floor, and I prayed like a good 'un."

Lucy's mouth laughed, but her eyes prayed.

"Then, maybe," she said, "if it hadn't been for you, I wouldn't be here now."

"I'd like to think that," I said; "but there must have been lots of others who prayed. I should like nothing better than a Carnegie hero medal, with the attached pension, but the jury require proofs."

"It's funny," she said, "to think of you kneeling on the icy floor and praying for me."

"For your *recovery!*" I corrected her.

"I think it would have been nicer if you had prayed for me. Didn't you—even a little?"

"If I had realized that I could be seven years older than you and still belong to the same generation, my prayers would have been altogether different, and there would have been more of them."

"Where do you think *this* road goes?"

She turned into it without waiting for an answer, and urged her pony into a gentle amble.

I caught up with her and said: "I know this trail. It will take us straight to the Whitney drive. Then

we can go right up over the hill and come out by Sand River."

"It's fun," she said, "to find somebody that likes riding. Everybody's mad about golf. John rides whenever I ask him, but it's cruel to separate him from the new mid-iron that Jimmie made for him. And he won't let me ride alone."

Poor John Fulton showed little worldly wisdom in making that prohibition.

"I'd rather ride than eat," I said. "Will you ride again tomorrow?"

She quoted the Aiken story of the lonely bachelor in the boarding-house. He is called to the telephone, hears a hospitable voice that says, "Will you come to lunch tomorrow at one-thirty?" and answers promptly, "You *bet* I will! . . . Who is it?"

Just before you reach the Whitney drive there is a right angle turn from the trail which we were following; it back-tracks a little, errs and strays through some fine jasmine "bowers," and comes out at the old race track.

"It's early," I said; "let's go this way."

She wheeled her pony instantly.

"Do you always do what you're told?"

She bowed her head very humbly, and meekly, through a mischievous mouth, said: "Yes, sir!" And added: "Except when awfully long."

"What do you mean by that?"

"That the most fun is beginning something, and then beginning something else before you get all tired out and tangled up. Never say no until you are sure that what's been proposed isn't any good. *Then* back out!"

"Don't you ever say no?"

"I 'spect I was very badly brought up. Nobody ever said no to me."

We wound up a hot hillside among tangled masses of jasmine, in which here and there were set star-like golden flowers, whose gardenia-like perfume mixed with the resinous aromatic smell of the long-needle pines. I rode a little behind, on purpose, for I love to see a pretty woman turn her head and look backward across her shoulder. She has no pose more charming, unless it be when she stands before the "laughing mirror" and lifts her hands to her hair.

"I have often wondered," I said, "how you happened to marry Fulton. But now I understand. It was because you couldn't say no to anybody, and

"They met with an honest kiss, like lovers long parted."

yet he couldn't by any possible chance have been the first to ask. What has become of the first poor fellow to whom you were unable to say no? . . . And all the others?"

She looked back at me over her shoulder, her eyebrows lifted in an effort of memory, which, with a mischievous laugh, she presently abandoned.

"Why," she said, "as far as I know: 'One flew east and one flew west and one flew over the cuckoo's nest.'" I wish I could convey by words the lilt of her clear, fearless, boyish voice, the sparkle of mischief and daring in her eyes, and deep beneath, like treasures in the sea, that look of steadfastness, of praying, that made you wonder if she was really as happy and as carefree as she seemed to be, and not some loyal martyr upon the altar of matrimony.

To look at, she was but a child in her teens, slender and virginal, and yet I had it from Fulton himself that her babies had weighed nine pounds apiece and that she had nursed them both. "She looks down," he said, "with contempt, on bottle babies."

He was just coming in from golf, with the smug smile of one who has played a good round, on his face. His buggy boy, Cornelius Twombly, a black imp of twelve, who carried a razor in his hip pocket,

wore also the smug look of one who has caddied to victory, and won certain nickels and dimes from another caddie upon the main and minor issues of the match.

As Fulton climbed out of his rickety, clattering runabout, Mrs. Fulton slipped from her smart pony, and they met with an honest kiss, like lovers long parted, and at once each began to tell the other all about everything.

"If they love each other like that," I thought, "why doesn't he always ride with her, or why doesn't she always play golf with him?"

I heard such expressions as "And the new mid-iron" . . . "The jasmine will be in full bloom in a week." "As we were going to Black Jack" (this is the eighth hole at Aiken, where the holes are all so good that they are spoken of by name instead of by number). "Mr. Mannering is the *nicest* person to ride with," etc., etc.

Then Fulton remembered my existence. "You'll not go without a drink!" he said.

Mrs. Fulton's eyes confirmed the invitation, so I chucked the reins over my pony's head to make him think that he was tied to a hitching-post, and went into the house with them. But I did not stay long.

Fulton wanted to talk golf; Mrs. Fulton wanted to bathe and change into skirts, and I wanted to go away by myself and think. I wanted to study out why it was that toward the end of our ride together, whenever Mrs. Fulton spoke to me or looked back at me over her shoulder, my pulses seemed to quicken —and my breathing.

V

WE were at the beginning of those parlous times when the Democrats, having come into power upon a wave of impassioned idiocy and jealousy, were beginning to make us poor at home and despised abroad. A schoolmaster president, with three cabinet officers plucked by the hair from a Gilbert and Sullivan opera, had put a temporary end to all our best qualities as a nation, with the possible exception of the power to laugh at jokes.

It was a hectic winter in Aiken. Some of the richest members of the Aiken Club were in trouble. There was some talk of making two and a half cents a point bridge standard instead of five. Even my own father asked me to go a little light, if I could, and not be led into any foolishness. "I've not been hit yet," he said, "but you can't tell what the fools will do next." You heard very few bets made. There was less drinking. It was as if certain men were going into training in order to be at their very best when the worst times should come.

Fulton's Cartridge Company, with its headquarters in New York and its mills in Bridgeport, Connecticut, had not paid a dividend in some time. He had only his salary as president (twenty or twenty-five thousand a year, I believe), and it was with the drastic intention of cutting that salary in two, and otherwise paring the company's expenses to the quick, that he went north the first week in March.

I dined with them the night before he left. There were only four of us: the Fultons, myself, and one of those charming Southampton girls, with sea-blue eyes, and sunburned hair, who swim like seals, play tennis like men, and fear nothing. Evelyn Gray was the name of this particular one. I liked her immensely, and was not altogether sorry to learn that she was to keep Lucy Fulton company until Fulton returned.

But it was a somewhat depressing dinner. There was an atmosphere in the cheerful blue and white dining-room, the white panels of the doors and wainscoting had a narrow border of blue, like impending fate. Fulton, it seemed, had never yet been away from home over night. And this was a record of devotion which he was very loath to break. Even more loath to see it broken was Lucy Fulton.

"I tell him," she said, "that if he goes it will be the beginning of the end." She spoke in jest, and although Fulton laughed back at her you could see that what she had said troubled him and hurt him. "As a matter of fact," she went on, "he's been looking for an excuse for some time. And now he thinks he's found one, but it wouldn't pass in a court of chivalry. He could *write* to his old directors just as well as not. Oh, you needn't think you're the only one who's going to have a gay time. You needn't be surprised to hear that I, too, have left home in the company of a dark and fascinating foreigner. And anyway I shall give a dance and open all the champagne in the cellar."

"There are only two quarts and a pint," said Fulton, and he turned to me. "*You've* never been married, have you? So you don't know what the modern woman can spend when she gets going, do you?"

I had a pretty good idea, but did not make the admission and continued to look interrogative.

"Well," he said, smiling, "she just has to spend so much, she says so herself. Then her poor husband's dividends are passed, and still she has to spend so much; she just has to, she says so herself. Then her

poor husband's poor salary has to be cut in half, and she speaks calmly of giving dances and opening wine. Evelyn, I count on you as an old and tried friend. If necessary you will interpose your dead body between Lucy and this dance of hers."

Superficially he was very tolerant and good-natured, but you could see that beneath the surface, nerves were jumping, and that he was in that condition of financial and perhaps mental embarrassment which causes molehills to look like mountains. And it was here, and now, that I learned something new about Lucy; that even in jest she did not enjoy having economy preached to her. She looked a little sullen for a moment and bored.

"What's the matter with my giving a dance?" I asked.

"Oh, will you?" cried Lucy, the sullen look vanishing beneath a radiant flash of child-like joy and enthusiasm. "Where will you give it? At Wilcox's?"

"Anywhere you say."

Fulton tossed his hands in a merry gesture of despair.

"Now *you're* stung!" he said, and then to Lucy, with a swift change of voice and manner: "I was

only joking, you know that. If you want to give a dance, give it."

It was as if a child had cried to be taken up, and in the face of all the tenets of modern training, had been taken up. And you knew that with the lightest heart in the world Mrs. Fulton was going to spend money, which her husband could ill afford.

Shortly after dinner a loud yelling arose in the nursery, and the Fultons hurried off to investigate and give comfort, leaving the manipulation of a fearful and wonderful glass coffee machine to Evelyn Gray and me.

"Lucy," said Evelyn, "has as much idea of money as an alcohol lamp has. She ought to be well shaken. I don't believe John has been able to lay by a cent for a rainy day."

"But think what a run she gives him for his money. He's the original happy married man. Think how she works to make him comfortable, and how she mothers the babies, and how she hangs on his words, as if nobody else was present. Just now, most people would have sent a servant to find out which baby was making a disturbance, and why—but those two simply bolted for the nursery as if controlled by one brain and one set of muscles."

"Almost makes a bachelor wish he wasn't a bachelor!"

"Just the same I think they are a model of what married people ought to be. Since I got to know them pretty well, I've entirely changed my notions of the institution."

"I always thought it was a bully good institution," said Evelyn. Through two glass tubes water, raised almost to the boiling point by an alcohol flame, began to mount from one retort into another containing pulverized coffee.

"But," she went on with an affectation of melancholy, "I've never found the right man, or he's never found me."

"Have you looked," I asked, "diligently and with patience?"

She lifted her fine sea-blue eyes to mine. "Not so diligently, I hope, as to be conspicuous," she said. "But no girl fails to examine the possibility of every man she meets—married or single—and the girl you think the most matter-of-fact is the one who most often slips out of bed, sits by her window, and looks at the moon."

"Do *you* want to get married?"

"There, you're not merely surprised, you're

shocked at the idea. Of *course* I do. Look now the coffee's running down into the bottom thing. What do we do next?"

"It's too pale," I said. "Put the lamp back and send it through again. And pray that it don't explode. But listen—for the sake of argument—I want to get married, too."

"*You!* A nice husband *you'd* make!"

"That's what I wanted to know. So even I have had my matrimonial possibilities examined into by matter-of-fact ladies, who sit at windows in their nightgowns, and look at the moon! I didn't like to ask more directly. Now tell me what's wrong with me?"

Her eyebrows rose mirthfully. "Are we playing truths, or shall I let you down easily?"

"I want the truth."

"Well, if your father lost his money, or disinherited you, you couldn't support a wife."

"Decision deferred," I said.

"You would begin married life with the highest and most generous resolutions; your subsequent fall would be all the harder for your wife to bear. You have a certain something about you that few really good men have, that attracts women. How long

could you let that power rest without experimenting to see if you still had it? Not very long. You are the kind of man whose wife doesn't dare to have a good-looking maid."

"There," I said somewhat nettled, "you do me an injustice."

"You are a faithful friend," she said, "but you wouldn't be a faithful lover. Change and excitement and risk are bread and meat to you."

"Look here," I said, laughing, "you've not only considered me, you've considered me more than once, and seriously!"

"You have always," she said, "charmed me far more than was good for me."

I answered her mocking look with one as mocking.

"I should like," I said, "nothing better than to disprove all the things you think about me."

"You never will."

"Do you know what I think about myself? I think that I shall astonish the world with one of those grand passions which make history worth reading. The girl who gets me will be very lucky!"

"If you ever do have a grand passion," said Evelyn thoughtfully, "and it's just barely possible,

it won't be for a girl. It won't be the kind that brings any good to anybody."

As they appeared in the door of the living-room, Fulton's hand dropped from his wife's waist. She was very rosy and lovely. They looked as if they had loitered on their way back from the nursery.

"Mrs. Fulton," I said, "I don't like your coffee-machine because I think it's going to explode, and we don't know how to get the coffee out. And I don't like your friend. She *has* exploded and scalded me cruelly."

"Oh," said Lucy, with the look of a knowing child, "I know, you've been playing truths, and Evelyn's got a New England conscience."

"If she wasn't so good-looking," I said, "I don't believe people would have her around, after a few experiences."

"You must try not to let her get on your nerves," said Fulton, "for I'm counting on you to keep an eye on this household while I'm away, and to see that those who inhabit it behave themselves."

"I don't want any more talk about going away," said Mrs. Fulton; "the fact is bad enough. I'm not a bit ashamed to have people know that I'll be miserable and cross all the time you are gone."

But she wasn't.

I saw her the next day just after his train had pulled out. She had taken Jock and Hurry to see him off. And all three, I was told by an eye-witness, had wept openly and without shame. My informant, Mrs. Deering, said that she had been reminded of Louis XVI leaving his family for the scaffold. But when I saw them five minutes later (you could still hear the far-off coughing of the northbound train) only Hurry looked grave, while Jock and his mother were illustrating to perfection the old adage, "Out of sight out of mind."

They did not look like a mother and her children, but like a big sister with her very littlest brother and sister. Hurry, sitting in the middle, was being allowed to hold the reins and the whip. She was in her usual hurry, and you could see at a glance that over any actual use of the whip friction was constantly arising. Under the runabout could be seen the thin dangling legs of Cornelius Twombly. I waved and shouted. Mrs. Fulton and Jock waved and shouted back, and Hurry seized the opportunity to strike cunningly with the whip. The horse lurched sharply forward, the three handsome bare heads jerked sharply back, and upon two wheels, in dust

and laughter, they rounded the nearest corner and vanished.

I was going nowhere in particular, and so I turned my pony and trotted after them. If they came to grief, I thought, I owed it to Fulton to be on hand to pick up the pieces. But I didn't really expect to be useful. I caught them just as they pulled up in front of their house, and within a minute Hurry had commandeered me to ride her round the block, so I took her up in front, and we had a fine ride; then Jock, looking wistful, had to have his turn, and after that I was ordered to leave my pony and come see the new sand pile and the new puppy. Mrs. Fulton had gone into the house and left me to my fate, so I gave a hand to Jock and a hand to Hurry, and they dragged me to their own particular playground, and made me build King Solomon's palace in the "Butterfly that Stamped," and plant a whole palace garden with sprigs of box and Carolina cherry. And I built and planted with all my might, and it was a lot of fun, until suddenly Hurry crawled into my lap and laid her head against me and went to sleep.

"You mustn't mind her," said Jock, "she's only a little baby."

I didn't mind her a bit; but somehow she had

taken all the fun out of me, and made me feel more serious and tender than I liked. I made her as comfortable as I could, and presently my own crossed legs began to go to sleep; the new puppy made a hunter-like dash into the nearest shrubbery, Jock caught up his bow and arrow and followed, the children's nurse scuttled off toward the kitchen wing for a cup of tea, and I was generally abandoned to my fate.

Once or twice Hurry twitched sharply as all young animals do in sleep; and once she shook her head quite sharply as if a dream had required something of her and been denied. Then she turned her face upward so that it was in the full glare of the sun and because I had no hat I shielded it with my hand.

Then very quietly came Lucy Fulton and stood looking down at us, and I looked up at her, and in that exchange of glances was promoted from an acquaintance to an old and intimate friend of the family. Thereafter we did not have to make new beginnings of conversations, but could if we chose resume where we had left off.

Hurry waked as suddenly as she had gone to sleep, and Lucy made her thank me for taking such good care of her. But when it was time for me to

get up out of the hot sand, I couldn't at first because of the soundly sleeping legs, and when I managed it, it was for Hurry's benefit, with a great, and I hope, humorous exaggeration of the pains and difficulties.

I don't know why I drank so many cocktails that night before dinner, nor so much champagne at dinner, nor so many whiskies afterward. I had neither made a heavy killing at the races, nor met with disaster. If the day differed from other days it was only in this, that I had received the confidence of a little child and her mother; that this confidence had touched my heart very nearly, and given me the wish to be of use to those two, and if necessary to sacrifice my selfish self for them. Feeling then that I was a better man than I had thought myself, elated with that thought, and almost upon the brink of good resolutions, I cut into a rubber of bridge, and began to drink cocktails. Why, I shall never know. Let those who drink explain and understand, each to himself, and let those who don't drink despise and condemn, publicly, as is usual with them.

VI

I WAS feeling very sentimental by the time I got to bed. I had had a long, and I suppose maudlin, talk with Harry Colemain on the beauties of matrimony. We had maintained the Fultons against all comers, as our ideal example of that institution.

"Just think," I said, "this very night is the first one that John has been away from her since they were married. That's going some. That's some record. He boarded the train like a man mounting the scaffold to have his head chopped off."

I almost cried over the touching picture which I felt I had drawn.

"There aren't many couples like them," Harry agreed wistfully. "But I bet even you and I had it in us to be decent and faithful if we'd ever struck the right girl. Those things are the purest luck, and we've been unlucky. But it makes me sick to be as old as we are, and no nearer *home* than the day we left college."

"When that baby was asleep in my lap—did I tell you about that?"

"Twice," said Harry mournfully.

I didn't believe him, and related the episode again. "It was wonderful," I said; "she was like a little stove with a fire in it. She made me feel so trusted and tender that I could have put back my head and bawled like a wolf. Think of having babies like that for your very own, and a wife like Lucy Fulton thrown in."

"She could have married most anybody," said Harry, "but she took a poor man and a rank outsider because she—hic—loved him. That's the kind of girl she is! Why nobody ever thought she'd settle to anybody. I bet she broke her word to half a dozen men, before she gave it to Fulton and kept it."

"I wouldn't call him exactly an outsider," I said; "anyway she's made an insider of him. Everybody likes him, and admires him. I never thought much of him at school, but I think he's a peach now. And he understands everything you say to him."

"He understands a good deal more than we'll ever be able to say to him. *He's* got brains. Evelyn Gray is staying with them."

"I know she is. I dined there last night. She's looking very pretty."

"She *is* pretty," said Harry, "and she's got pretty hands and feet; most pretty women haven't. It's usually the woman with a face that would stop a clock that has pretty feet."

"Like Mrs. Deering," I suggested.

"Exactly," he said. "But Deering is no fool."

"How do you mean he isn't a fool?"

"Why," said Harry, "he makes her sleep with her feet on the pillow."

This struck me as very funny, and I laughed until I had forgotten what I was laughing at. Harry got laughing, too, after a while. He put his whole soul in it. Then we ordered two bottles of ale and had some fat wood put on the fire, and watched it roar and sputter with flame as only fat wood can. After much meditation and a swallow of the fresh-brought ale, my mind began to harp on Evelyn Gray, and to magnify her good looks and attractions. So I said:

"Harry, why don't *you* marry Evelyn?"

For a moment he scowled at the fire. Then he spoke in a bitter voice.

"Suppose *I* wanted to, and *she* wanted to," he said, "still we couldn't."

"Why not?" I asked innocently, expecting, I think, that his phrase was some sort of a conundrum.

"Why, Archie, my boy," he said, and his scowl faded to a look of weariness and disgust, "it looks as if I might have to marry somebody else."

"Not——?"

He nodded. And presently he said, "It will be best for her—of course."

"But I haven't heard even a rumor. Has he started anything?"

"No. He's a decentish little chap. He's trying to make up his mind whether to divorce her or be divorced himself. It hinges on the children. If he divorces her he'll get them, and if he lets himself be divorced, she will."

"It's big trouble, Harry!"

"Yes. For we are sick and tired of each other. I'd rather like to blow my head off."

"But if she divorces him, you needn't marry her."

He rose slowly to his full height and held out his hand. "I'm going to turn in," he said. "Good night."

"Good night, Harry. I'm sorry for you, you know that."

"I only have my deserts," he said. "Sensible men, like you, steer clear of family complications."

When he had gone I had another bottle of ale in

front of the fire, and from thinking of Harry, I got to thinking of how well ale seemed to go on top of whiskey, and to congratulating myself on my strong head and stomach. "Nobody," I thought complacently, "would suspect that I had been drinking." Then I got to thinking once more about Evelyn Gray. It was time I settled down, why not with Evelyn—if only to prove to her that the truths she had told me about myself weren't true? I began to fancy that I had in me all the qualities that go to make the ideal husband, and that in Evelyn were to be found all the qualities which make the ideal wife. I could have wept to think what a good sportsman she was, and how Pilgrim-father honest.

On her writing-desk my mother has three little monkeys carved in ivory. One has his hands clapped to his ears, one to his eyes, and the other to his mouth. Their names are "Hear no Evil," "See no Evil," and "Speak no Evil."

I have to pass her door to get to my room. But late at night that door is never left ajar. She is not the kind of mother who puts in a sudden (and wholly accidental!) appearance when her son is coming home a little the worse for wear. She has never seen me the worse for wear (and I'm not very of-

ten), and if she has her way (and I have mine) she never will.

"What in thunderation started *you* last night?" said my father at breakfast.

"I'm hanged if I know," I said; "but what makes you think I got started?"

"I'd just put out the lights in the library when you came in. You stopped in front of the hall mirror, and said:

> "Beautiful Evelyn Gray is dead
> Come and sit by her side an hour."

"I *didn't*," I exclaimed indignantly.

My father began to chuckle all over like Santa Claus in the Christmas poem.

"You mean beautiful Evelyn Hope, don't you?" I asked.

"Gray was the name."

"I'd like to know what *you* were doing up so late?"

"Oh, we had a big night—three tables of bridge and one of poker. I sat up late to count my winnings."

"How much did you drop, as a matter of fact?"

"Only about eighty."

"Any twinges this morning?"

"No, sir. And a better appetite than you've got."

"I doubt that."

And, indeed, we both ate very hearty breakfasts.

VII

IF I thought that Lucy would be melancholy during her husband's absence I was mistaken. It was almost as if she had no husband. She was like some radiant schoolgirl home for the holidays. But I am pretty sure that Fulton missed her during every waking moment. He wrote to her at least twice a day and sent her many telegrams.

"He knows what a shocking memory I have," she explained; "and he's afraid that I'll forget him unless constantly reminded. Wouldn't it be funny if people only existed for us when they were actually present? Some time I think I'm a little like that about people. Until I really fell in love, I always loved the boy that was on the spot."

"I've heard that you were an outrageous flirt."

"I didn't know my own mind. *That* isn't flirting. And when a boy said he liked me, I was so pleased and flattered that I always said I liked him, too, and the minute he was out of sight, I'd find that I didn't."

A few days of hot sunshine had worked wonders with the jasmine. Here and there the bright golden

trumpets were so massed as to give an effect of bonfires; here and there a vine carried beauty and sweetness to the top of a tall tree, or festooning among the branches resembled a string of lights. The humming of bees was steady and insistent like the roar of far-off surf. And so strong was the mounting of the sap that already the twigs and branches of deciduous trees appeared as through a mist of green. The buds on the laurel, swollen and pink, looked like sugar decorations for wedding cakes. Flashes of brightest blue and scarlet told of birds recently arrived from still farther south. Lucy Fulton had just received a telegram from her husband, saying that in New York a blizzard was raging.

She was in one of her talkative moods. Her voice, clear and boyish and far-carrying, was so easy and pleasant to listen to that it didn't matter much what she said. Should I convey an erroneous impression and one derogatory to a charming companion if I said that she chattered along like a magpie?

She talked about servants, and I gathered that she had never had any trouble with servants. And I thought, "Why should you, you who are so friendly, so frank, and so kind?" She gave me both sides of the argument about bare legs for children versus

stockinged legs. She confessed to an immense passion for so lowly a dish as stewed prunes, she memorialized upon dogs and horses that had belonged to her. I learned that her favorite story was the "Brushwood Boy," that her favorite poem was "The Last Ride Together," and that her favorite flower was Olea fragrans, the tea-olive (she really said its Latin name), whose waxy-white blossom is no bigger than the head of a pin, and whose fragrance is as that of a whole basketful of hot-house peaches.

Had I really and truly liked the teagown she wore the other night? Would I cross my heart to that effect? Well, then, she had made it all herself in a day. If the worse came to the worst, if cartridges fell upon still more evil days, she would turn dressmaker, and become rich and famous. Wasn't it a pity that John had to work so hard, and miss so many lovely days?

"I think he'd be quite rich," she said, "if it wasn't for me. I was brought up to spend all the money I wanted to, and I don't seem able to stop. I know it isn't fair to John, and John says it isn't fair to the babies, and I make beautiful resolutions and forget all about them."

"But now that your husband has had to cut his

salary in half, you'll simply have to be good, won't you?"

She admitted that now she would simply have to be good. And a moment later she was making plans for the dance that she was going to give at Wilcox's.

"Why wouldn't it be a fine beginning of economy to cut that dance out?" I asked. "Why not let me give it? I'm quite flush just now. It wouldn't hurt me a bit."

"I thrashed it all out with John," she said, "that same night after you'd gone. He told me to go ahead, and not disappoint myself. I didn't see why you shouldn't give a dance for me if you wanted to, and I wanted you to. But John wouldn't listen to that for a minute. I must say I couldn't see why, and I don't yet. It isn't like paying my dressmaker's bill, or giving me a pearl necklace. I said that. And he said no, it wasn't like that, but that it was a second cousin twice removed."

"I think he'd be mightily pleased if he came back and found that the price of this dance was still to his credit in that firm and excellent institution, the Bank of Western Carolina."

"If we are really hard up," she said, "what does a few hundred dollars matter one way or the other?"

It seemed to me that I had done all that I could to save Fulton's money for him. I had the feeling that if I continued to preach economy I might get myself disliked, for already Lucy seemed to have lost something of her light-heartedness and vivacity.

"When do you give it?" I said. "Please ask me."

"I shall give it day after tomorrow night," she said; "and I shall ask everybody in Aiken."

I said that she insulted me, and then we laughed like two silly children, and light-heartedness and vivacity returned to her like two bright birds to a flowering bush. We planned the dance in full detail. There was just time to get a famous quartette down from Washington. She would have the rooms decorated with wagon-loads of jasmine. Once I had seen the expression of Hurry's face upon learning that there was to be chocolate ice cream for dessert. In planning her dance Lucy's face had just the same expression. When she was excited with happiness it seemed to me that she had the loveliest face I had ever seen.

We rode until dusk, but I could not accept her invitation for tea or a drink, because my mother was expecting some people over from Augusta and I had promised to come home. The people's motor, how-

ever, had broken down, and I found my mother all alone, presiding at a tea table that almost groaned with good things to eat.

"What have you been doing?" she asked.

"I've been riding—as you see. I've been riding with Mrs. Fulton."

"Again? It seems to me you ride with her every day. You must find her fascinating, or you wouldn't do it."

"You read me like a book, mother. I certainly wouldn't. But don't you think fascinating is rather a strong word? She's the most easy-going and engaging little person in the world, but fascinating . . . ? Fascination suggests the effect of paint and fixed smiles and lights and spangles upon old men with bald heads, the effect of the wily serpent upon the guileless bird."

"Aiken," said my mother, "is such a very small place."

"It isn't like you to beat about the bush. Why not say frankly that if I keep on I'll end by making Lucy Fulton conspicuous?"

"Very well," smiled my mother (very gently), "that's just what I do say."

"Aiken," I said, "can go hang. If two people

like to ride together, for no worse reason than that they like riding and are good friends, what earthly business is it of Aiken's? People make me sick. That's a bromide, but it's a good one. As for Lucy Fulton, I really like her a lot, and she really amuses me, but if I knew that I was never to see her again in this world, I'd lose no sleep over it. Why, they are the original happy married pair. Just think he's away from home for the first time since they were married. They make love to each other openly, right under your very nose, so that it's downright embarrassing. Latterly I've had a meal ticket at their house, and seeing them together with their babies, and noting all the peace and trustfulness and lovingness of it, has opened my eyes (that were so firmly shut) to the possibilities and beauties of matrimony."

"At any rate," said my mother, "you haven't talked yourself entirely out."

"Well, you see, I was a listener today. Part of the time I was lectured on the empty life I lead, and then I was almost persuaded that I ought to fall in love with Evelyn Gray, and she with me. I shouldn't wonder if Mrs. Fulton bullied us into it before she got through."

"It would be a delightful marriage," said my mother with enthusiasm, "for everybody."

"With the possible exception of Evelyn and me."

Just after this Evelyn, who was great friends with my mother, came in without being announced, and said that she was famished, and that she put herself entirely in our hands. So we fed her tea, toast, hot biscuits, three kinds of sandwiches, and as many kinds of cakes. And she finished off with a tumbler full of thick cream.

"Been sitting by your window lately," I asked, "looking at the moon?"

"*He* thinks," Evelyn complained to my mother, "that delicate sentiments and a hearty appetite don't go together. But we know better, don't we?"

"When I'm in love," I said, "I eat like a canary bird. I just waste away. Don't I, mother?"

"Fall in love with somebody," said my mother, "and I'll tell you."

"Nobody encourages me," I said; "my life has been one long rebuff, I remind myself of a dog with muddy paws; whenever I start to jump up I get a whack on the nose."

"Your sad lot," said Evelyn, "is almost the only

topic of conversation among sympathetic people. But of course, if you *will* have muddy paws——!"

"And yet, seriously," I said; "somewhere in this wide world there must be one girl in whose eyes I might succeed in passing myself off as a hero. I wish to heaven I had her address—a little cream?"

Evelyn scorned the hospitable suggestion and reached for her gloves and riding crop.

"I came to see you," she said to my mother, "really I did. And I've done nothing but eat. I'm coming again soon when there's nobody here but you, and the larder is low."

"Good Lord!" I said, when we had reached the front gate. "Where's your pony?"

"I sent him away," she said; "I'm walking. And you *don't have* to see me home."

"But if I want to? And anyway it's too late and dark for you to walk home alone. Once upon a time there was a girl and her name was Little Red Riding Hood, and once as she was walking home in the dark, after an unusually heavy tea, she met a wolf. And he said, 'Evening, Little Red Riding Hood,' and she, though she was twittering with fear, and in no condition for running because of the immensely heavy tea, said, 'Evening, Mr. Wolf.'"

"Come along then!" said Evelyn. "Already you have persuaded me that Little Red Riding Hood is a pig, and that she is in great danger."

But we didn't walk to the Fultons', we strolled. And the deep dusk turned to a velvety black night, soft and warm as a garment, and all spangled over with stars. It was one of the Aiken nights that smells of red cedar. We passed more than one pair of soft-voiced darkies who appeared to lean against each other as they strolled, and from whom came sounds like the cooing of doves. Once far off we heard shouting and a pistol shot, and presently one came running and crossed our path far ahead, but whether a white man or a black we could not tell.

The lights in the Fultons' yard had not yet been switched on. In a recess cut from the foliage of a cedar tree, a white garden seat glimmered in the starlight.

"It's too early to dress for dinner," I said, "and it's a pity to go indoors."

Without a word Evelyn turned into the fragrant recess. The sudden acquiescence of one usually so disputatious, where I was concerned, troubled me a little, because I could not explain it to my satisfac-

tion. It never had happened before. I could not see her face clearly enough to gather its expression, and so I put a cigarette in my mouth and struck a match. It missed fire, and Evelyn said, "Please don't. Unless you want to very much."

"I don't want to at all," I said; "it was just habit. Cedar smells better than tobacco, and that's saying a good deal."

She did not answer and a few moments later I said:

"Any other couple, I suppose, seated on this bench in these surroundings would make a noise like the cooing of doves. But either you or I don't say anything, like tonight walking home, or we fight. And yet I think that if the whole truth were told we like each other quite a good deal. I admit that you often say hard things about me to my face, but I deny that you say them behind my back. Behind my back I have heard that you sometimes make valiant and comradely efforts to—well to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, so to speak."

"I've always remembered," she said, very gently, "and never forgotten how nice you were to me at my coming-out party, when I was so scared and young and all. I thought you were the most wonderful

man in the world, and had the most understanding and the most tact."

She laughed softly, but not mirthfully.

"That night," she said; "if you'd asked me to run away with you I'd have done it like a shot."

"But tonight," I said, "if I so much as touched your hand, you'd turn into an icicle, and send me about my business with a few disagreeable truths to wear in my bonnet. And I think I know the reason. It's because on that first night, even if I had been desperately in love with you, I wouldn't have thought of asking you to run away with me, whereas now I can conceive of making such a proposition to somebody that I didn't even love two bits' worth—for no better reason than that she was lovely to look at and that the night smelled of cedar."

"I've only been out seven years," said Evelyn; "seven years tonight."

"Many happy returns, Evelyn. I had no idea this was an anniversary."

"It doesn't seem possible," she went on, "for a man to change his whole moral nature in seven years, and to boast about that change."

"I haven't changed and I didn't boast. If I ever knew what was right and what was wrong, I still

know. The only difference is that I used to think it mattered a lot, and now I'm not so sure. I see good people suffer, and wicked people triumph; and I don't think that everything is for the best in this best of worlds; I think most things are decidedly for the worst. Why should so many people be poor and sick and uncomfortable? Why should so many men marry the wrong girls, so many girls the wrong men? If we are suffering for our sins, well and good, but what was the use of making us so pesky sinful! You won't, of course, but most people come back at one with one's inability to comprehend—they always say 'comprehend' the Great Design. As if they themselves comprehended said Great Design to perfection. If there *is* a Great Design, no human being understands a jot of it; that's certain. Why be so sure then that something we don't understand, and which may not even exist, is absolutely right and beautiful? Suppose it could be proved to us that there was no Great Design, and no Great Designer, that the world was the result of some blind, happy-go-lucky creative force, what would we think of the world then, poor thing? A poor woman with nothing to live for walks the streets that she may live; a rich woman with much to live for dies slowly and in

great torture, of cancer. If we accept the Great Design we shouldn't even feel pity for these two women, we should say of them merely, 'How right! How beautiful!' But we do feel pity for them, and by that mere feeling of pity deny automatically the beauty of the Great Design, in the first place, and its subsequent execution. I can conceive, I think, of a lovely picture: you for instance, on a white bench, under a cedar in the starlight, listening to my delightful conversation, but I couldn't possibly draw the picture, let alone paint it. The Great Design, it seems to me, had a tremendous gift for landscape, but fell down a little when it came to people."

"Archie," said Evelyn, "you talk like an irreverent schoolboy."

"Of course I do," I said; "I must. I can't help myself. I am only playing my part in the Great Design. But if you believe in that then it is irreverent of you to say that my talk is anything but absolutely right, just, and beautiful. So there!"

She said nothing. And after a few moments of silence I began to feel sorry that I had talked flippantly.

"Evelyn," I said, "you mustn't mind poor old me."

Almost unconscious of what I was doing I lifted

her right hand from her lap, and held it in both mine. She made one feeble little effort to tug her hand away and then no more. In the heavens, a star slipped, and from the heavens fell, leaving a wake of golden glory. And it seemed after that sudden blazing as if the night was blacker than before.

I slid my left arm around her shoulders, and, unresisted, drew her a little toward me, until I could feel her heart beating strongly against mine.

Just then the latch of the house door turned with a strong oil click, the door swung open, and dark against the light illumination of the hall stood Lucy Fulton. As she stood looking and listening, the strong bell of the far-off courthouse clock began to strike. Long before the lights and last clanging concussion, Evelyn and I had withdrawn to the uttermost ends of our bench.

Then Lucy turned and went back into the house and shut the door after her.

Evelyn had risen.

"Good night," she said, but she did not hold out her hand.

"Good night," I said; "I've made you late. I'm sorry."

She started to speak, hesitated, and then said, very quietly, "Why did you make love to me just now?"

It seemed to me that the least I could do was to answer "Because I love you." But the words must have choked me, and with shame, I told her the truth.

"I made love to you," I said, "because I have only one life to live."

"I thought so," she said, still very quietly, and turned toward the house. But I had caught up with her in a mere crumb of time.

"I have been honest with you, Evelyn," I said; "will you be honest with me? I have told you why I made love to you. I want to know; it seems to me that I *ought* to know. Why did you let me?"

"Oh," she said, "I shut my eyes and pretended that we were in the conservatory, seven years ago tonight."

"Pretended?"

"Yes, Archie, honestly."

Halfway up the steps of the house she turned, and said a little wearily, "How many lives do you think *I* have to live?"

"May it be long and happy."

On that we parted, and I heard the ghost of a cynical laugh as she let herself into the house.

And I hurried home, inexcusably late for dinner, and filled with shame and remorse. And ever at the back of my head was the image, not of Evelyn Gray, vague and illusive in the starlight, but of that other image that had stood forth dark and sharply defined against the light of the hall.

"Lucy Fulton," I said to myself, "you came in the nick of time. And you are my good angel."

VIII

ON the following day I had no especial desire to see Evelyn. I thought that it might be embarrassing for her, and I knew that it would be embarrassing for me, so that it was not without trepidation that I presented myself at the Fultons' house to keep a riding engagement with Lucy.

But you never know what will embarrass a woman and what won't. I remember when the Jocelyn house burned down, and nothing was saved but a piano (at which Peter Reddy seated himself and played the "Fire Music") and a scuttle of coal, how Mrs. Jocelyn, usually the shyest and most easily shocked person in the world, came down a ladder in nothing but a flimsy nightgown, and stood among us utterly unselfconscious and calmly making the best of things, until someone (it was a warm night and there were no overcoats in the crowd) tore down a veranda awning and wrapped her in it. And I remember a certain very rich and pushing Mrs. Edison from somewhere in New Jersey who worked

herself almost into the top circle of society, and was then caught in a very serious and offensive lie, which ended her social career as suddenly as a sentence is ended by a period. I had been present when she told the lie, and I was present when it was brought home to her, and I felt almost as sick as if I had told it myself, and been caught. But she didn't turn a hair. She just laughed and said, "Yes. I made it up. What are you going to do about it?" Morgan Forbes, about whom the lie had been told, was trembling so with rage that he could hardly articulate. He said, "The next time you set foot in Newport you will be arrested and prosecuted for criminal libel." And she knew that he meant it and that her career was ended; still she didn't turn a hair. You couldn't help admiring her. Sometimes I can't help wondering what has become of her. She looked like one of those Broken Pitcher girls that Greuze painted; and you'd no more have expected to find poison in her than in a humming-bird.

Nor did Evelyn show any embarrassment whatever. She was sitting cross-legged on the big living-room lounge, reading a Peter Rabbit book to Jock and Hurry, and looking cool as a lily. She looked serene and aloof. I could not believe that only a

few hours before she had felt that, having but one life to live, nothing mattered much one way or another. "At least," I thought, "she'll never wish to talk the thing over, and that's a blessing!"

Lucy, dressed for riding, was drumming on a window-pane, and looking out into the shady, overgrown garden. I thought her expression a little quizzical, her hand a little cool and casual, not altogether friendly. And I was surprised to find how great an effect of discomfort and dreariness this thought had upon me.

"Any news from the man of the house?" I asked.

"Be back Monday," she said. This was a day sooner than she had expected him, but she spoke without any show of enthusiasm. Indeed, she spoke a little wearily. I had never seen her face with so little color in it. Evelyn, after a friendly nod, and a "You mustn't interrupt," had gone on with her reading.

"Are we riding?" I said. "We don't seem to be wanted here."

"Yes," said Lucy. "Let's ride. I feel as if I hadn't exercised for a week." She led the way to the ponies, through the garden and round the house,

almost brusquely. A Spanish bayonet pricked her in the arm, and she made a monosyllabic exclamation in which there was more anger than pain. Usually so gay and chattersome, she seemed now a petulant and taciturn creature.

But she was no sooner astride her pony than the color returned to her cheeks, and the sparkle, if not the gayety, to her eyes. And at once, as if her taciturnity had been a vow, to be ended when she should touch leather, she began to talk. "I'm cross with you," she said.

"With *me?*"

"About last night. I thought—I don't know what I thought. But I've liked you so much. And all your thoughts about people are kind and generous, and I simply won't believe that it's all put on for effect, and——"

"What about last night? I didn't even see you. What have I done?"

"Evelyn saw you, didn't she? Well, I saw Evelyn right afterward. A child could have seen that she was upset, and I made her tell me all about everything. You don't care two straws about her, really. Do you?"

"Does she care two straws about me?"

"Was it just one of those things that happen when it's dark and romantic and two people feel lonely, and——"

"And have forgotten yesterday, and aren't considering tomorrow. But nothing did happen. You came out on the porch, and the courthouse bell sounded a shockingly late hour, and if we didn't remember yesterday or consider tomorrow, at least we thought of dinner."

"Evelyn," said Lucy, "was wild with anger and shame."

"I am sorry."

"You don't look a bit sorry."

"I don't believe a man is ever sorry unless he makes real trouble."

"Isn't losing faith in oneself real trouble?"

"And who has done that?"

"Why, Evelyn, of course. She thought that she was as unapproachable as an icicle, and now she says all sorts of wild things about herself. Just before you came in the children asked her to read Peter Rabbit to them. She said she would, but that she didn't think she was *fit* to."

I burst out laughing, and so did Lucy. "And still," she cried, "you don't look sorry."

"I'm looking at you," I said, "and I'm hanged if I can look at you and either feel sorry or half the time keep a straight face. And if I could, I wouldn't. As for Evelyn I'm glad she's found out that she isn't an icicle. Look here; I'll bet you a thousand dollars she's engaged or married within a year, beginning today."

"I couldn't pay if I lost," said Lucy. "But if you'll make it ten dollars, I'll take you ten times."

We shook hands, and then, as is usual, tried to prove that we had bet wisely.

"She's lonely," I said, "that's all that is the matter with her. She sees all her friends married and established, she has the perfectly ludicrous idea that she is not as young as she used to be. She feels like an ambitious thoroughbred that's been left at the post."

To this characterization of Evelyn Lucy took opposing views. Her friend, as a matter of fact, wasn't in the least lonely, but was excellent company for herself, and led a full life. She was not the marrying kind. If she liked men it was only because they played the games she liked to play better than women play them. "Imagine Evelyn," she said, "unable to eat, unable to sleep! Imagine her sitting

at the window in her nightgown and looking pensively at the moon!"

"Funny," I said, "but that's just what I was imagining. All girls do it and some wives. It's as much a part of a girl as long hair, and the fear of spiders. If a girl didn't get her moon bath now and then, she'd just shrivel up and die."

"Well," said Lucy, and she pretended to sigh, "there may be something in it. But not for Evelyn."

A moment later.

"Listen," she said, "just to make me out wrong, and win my good money you wouldn't——"

"My word," I said, "you are suspicious. But I thought you were a born matchmaker. I thought you'd be pleased if you got Evelyn and me married!"

"It wouldn't do at all," she said.

"Why not?"

"Oh," she said, "if you must know, it's because I like you—both—better the way you are."

And from a walk she put her pony into a brisk gallop, and I followed suit, and caught up with her. And I was a little moved and troubled by what she had said. For it seemed to me as if she had said it of me alone, and that the inclusion of Evelyn in

that delayed and hanging fire "both" of her phrase had been an afterthought.

After a pleasant uphill while of soft galloping, she signaled with her hand, and once more the ponies walked.

"Tell me truthfully," she said. "*Are* you interested in Evelyn?"

"Is it manners for a man to say he isn't interested in a girl?"

"You couldn't say it to me, because—Oh, because, I really want to know."

"Mrs. Fulton," I said, "if I've made her think so, I deserve to be kicked."

"Then that's all right. She knows exactly the value to put on your attentions. And I'm glad."

"Why?"

"I don't think it would be much fun to ride with a man who couldn't bring his mind along with him, do you? Especially now that all the flowers are popping out and it's so lovely in the woods."

"But," I said, "you have yet to forgive me for last night."

"There's nothing to forgive," she said. "Don't you know that though the man always takes the blame, it's always the girl's fault. A man can't get

himself into trouble by just sitting still and looking pensive, but a girl can. From the moment Evelyn sat on that bench under the cedar she had only one thought. It was to see if she could make you kiss her."

"No, no, Mrs. Fulton," I exclaimed. "It wasn't a bit like that. Honestly it wasn't."

"In that case," said Mrs. Fulton, and her rosy face was at its very gayest, "Evelyn is a liar."

"She told you that she tried to make me?"

"Why, what else was there for her to be ashamed about?"

"But you said she was also angry."

"I suppose," said Lucy mischievously, "she was angry because I came out on the porch."

IX

IN the days of the waltz and the twostep, Aiken did not dance, but immediately upon the introduction of the Turkey Trot and the Grizzly Bear, she made honorable amends. Wilcox built an oval ballroom with a platform for musicians, the big room at the Golf Club was found to have a capital floor, and the grip of bridge whist upon society was rudely loosened.

Whatever may be said in derogation of the modern dances, they have rejuvenated the old and knocked a lot of nonsense out of the young. To my eye there is nothing more charming than a well-danced maxixe. To dance well a man must be an athlete and a musician; to be either is surely a worthy ambition. To dance well a girl must at the very least have grace and charm.

So far as I am concerned, Lucy Fulton's dance was a great success, from the arrival of the first guest. I was the first guest.

We had a whole dance to ourselves while Evelyn was busy with the telephone and before the second guest arrived. In all her life Lucy had never looked

more animated or more lovely. The musicians caught her enthusiasm and the high spirit which flowed from her like an electric current, and at once these things appeared in their music.

"I've only one sorrow," I said, "that I can't dance with you and watch you dance at the same time."

"But if you had to choose one or the other?"

"I shall choose often," I said, "but I'm afraid others will begin getting chosen. If I had my way there would be no other man but me and no other girl but you, and we'd dance till breakfast time."

"Evelyn," said Lucy, her eyes full of mischief, "could chaperon us from a bench. She could send for her knitting."

"Who is this Evelyn?" I said.

And then the rhythm of the music became too much for us, and we did not speak any more, only danced; only danced and liked each other more and more.

That night it seemed there were no tired men or women in Aiken. There were no lingering groups of yarn-swapping men in the buffet, only half-melted humanity who gulped down a glass of champagne and flew back to the dance. We made so much noise

that half the dogs in Aiken barked all night, and roosters waked from sleep began to crow at eleven o'clock.

I am sure that Lucy did not give many thoughts to poor John Fulton, worrying his head off in far New York. She had the greatest power upon her own thoughts of any woman or man I ever knew. And always she chose agreeable and even delightful things to think about. When I try to make castles in the air I get worrying about details, such as neighbors and plumbing. Sometimes I have felt that it would be agreeable to run away from everyone and everything, and live on some South Sea beach in an undershirt and an old pair of trousers. I can see the palms and the breadfruit, as well as the next man. I can picture the friendly brown girls with their bright, black eyes and their long necklaces of scarlet flowers and many-colored shells, and I can hear the long-drawn roar of the surf on the coral beach. But always my bright, hopeful pictures go to smash on details. More insistent than the roar of the surf, I hear the humming of great angry mosquitoes, and I try to figure out what I should do if I came down with appendicitis and no surgeon within a thousand miles.

Lucy chose her thoughts as she would have selected neckties, choosing the pretty ones, tossing the ugly ones aside and never thinking of them again, or, for that matter, of the bill for the pretty neckties that would be sent to her husband. Only very great matters, such as love and death, could have occupied her mind against her will.

Toward one o'clock the dance became hilarious. One or two men had the good sense to go home, two or three others had not. One of them—the King boy—made quite a nuisance of himself, and to revenge himself for a snub (greatly exaggerated by the alcoholic mind), sought and found the hotel switchboard and in the midst of a fox trot shut off all the lights.

But the music went right on, and so did many of the dancers. There were violent collisions, shouts of laughter, and exclamations of pain.

I was facing the nearest wall of the room when the lights went out and I backed Lucy toward it, and then, groping, for I hadn't a match in my clothes, found it and stood guard over her, one hand pressing the wall on each side of her and my back braced. I received one thundering jolt over the kidneys, and one cruel kick on the ankle bone. And

then the lights went on again, and we finished our dance.

Lucy said she hated people who weren't cool and collected in time of danger. That if she was ever in a theater when it caught fire she hoped there'd be somebody with her, like *me,* to take care of her! "That was the neatest thing," she said, "the way you got us out of that. We might have been knocked down and trampled to death."

When that dance ended, we went out of doors for a few minutes to get cool. We took a turn the length of the narrow, sanded yard and back. We could hear the buggy boys just beyond the tall privet hedge. Some were cracking jokes; others were heavily snoring, and there were whispered conversations that had to do, no doubt, with mischief, and petty crimes.

"It's been a grand party," I said. "By and by I'm going to give one."

"But not for me, you know, just a spontaneous party. Oh, do please, will you?"

"Of course I will. But it will really be given——"

"I mustn't know."

"You shall never know if you mustn't."

"I think you ought to dance once with Evelyn."

"I have danced with her, but only half a dance. She said she was tired—and then she finished it with Dawson Cooper."

"I wish they'd get to like each other."

"So do I. They're the right age. They've the right amount of money between them, and they like the same sort of things. But it rests with Evelyn. Dawson would fly to a dropped handkerchief as a pigeon flies home; but he's very shy and doesn't think much of himself."

It seemed a good omen when we entered the main hall and found them sitting out a dance together.

Dawson rose, but with some reluctance, it seemed to me.

"Isn't it about my turn, Lucy?" he said. "Will you?"

"Did Evelyn tell you you had to?"

He blushed like a schoolboy, and Evelyn burst out laughing.

"Then I will," said Lucy, "when I see a man trying to do his duty like a man, I help him always, and besides you dance like a breeze."

So they went away together, he apologizing and she teasing.

"How about me?" I said to Evelyn. "Is it my turn?"

"No," she said, "it isn't. I want to talk to you."

I sat down facing her in the chair that Dawson Cooper had occupied. "Just now," she said, "when you and Lucy went outside, I heard someone say to someone else——"

"Hadn't they any names?"

"No. She said to him, 'It's about time John Fulton came back. Lucy's making a fool of herself.'"

Somehow I seemed to turn all cold inside.

"Of course," said Evelyn, "Lucy knows and you know and I know, but the man in the street who sees you ride out together day after day, and the woman who's no particular friend of yours, who sees you dance dance after dance together—*they* don't know. Aiken is a small place, but like the night, it has a thousand eyes, and as many idle tongues. If I didn't know Lucy so well, and you so well, I'd be a little worried."

"Why," I said, "it's a golf year. Nobody would rather ride, except Lucy and me."

"The reason doesn't matter," said Evelyn. "When two young people are together a whole lot, their feelings don't stand still. They either get to like

each other less and less, or more and more. You and Lucy don't like each other less and less. Anybody can see that, so it must be more and more. And there's always danger in that. Isn't there?"

I thought for a moment, and then said: "Not for her, certainly."

"You knew Lucy when she was a little girl, but you didn't see her often when she was growing up, did you? Her best friend never thought that she would ever settle to any one man. She was the most outrageous little flirt you ever saw. No, not outrageous, because each time she thought she was really in love herself. It was one boy after another, all crazy about her, and she about them. Then it was one man after another. What Lucy doesn't know about moonlight and verandas, and the sad sounds of the sea at night, isn't worth knowing. But all the time, from the time she was fifteen, there was John Fulton in the background. He was never first favorite till she actually accepted him and married him, but he was always in the running, in second or third place, and whether he won her down by faithfulness and devotion nobody knows. Nobody quite knows how or why she changed toward him. I don't believe she does. He

was just about the last man anybody thought she'd marry. But anyway her young and flighty affections got round to him at last, and fastened to him. They fastened to him like leeches. No man was ever loved as hard as she loved him when she got round to it. She made up for all the sorry dances she'd led him. She was absolutely shameless. She made love to him in public, she——"

"She still does, Evelyn," I said. "I think that's one reason why I like her so much, and him. There's nobody else so frank and natural about their feelings for each other. Why, it's beautiful to see."

"Archie," said Evelyn, "for short periods of time she loved some of the men she didn't marry almost as hard."

After a moment's silence, she said with hesitation.

"It's a lucky thing for her that all the men she thought she cared about were gentlemen. You must have noticed yourself how little yesterday means to her, how less than nothing tomorrow means, until it becomes today."

"Well," I said, "it all boils down to this, that after many vicissitudes, she found her Paradise at last."

"Who can be sure that a girl who had as many love affairs as she had is—all through!"

Just then Dawson Cooper came back and took Evelyn away with him. I was immensely interested in all that she had told me about Lucy. I rather wished that I might, for a while, have been one of the many. And I was annoyed to learn that people were undertaking to make our business theirs.

"I'll tell John about it when he comes back," I said, "and if he thinks best, why I won't see so much of her."

But when he came back it did not seem worth while to tell him.

X

I HAD forgotten that John Fulton was to return Monday, until Lucy gave it as a reason for not being able to ride on that afternoon.

"Even if the train is on time," she said, "I don't think I ought to go chasing off, do you? He'd like us all to be at home together and maybe later he'd like me to take him for a little drive."

She was rather solemn for Lucy. I did not in the least gather that she would rather ride with me than play around with her husband. I did gather that she was not using her own wishes and preferences as an excuse, but the physical fact of John's home-coming. And I learned in the same moment that I wished his return might be indefinitely postponed, and that Monday afternoon with no Lucy to ride with promised to be a bore.

I saw her doing chores in the village, Jock and Hurry crowded into the seat beside her, just before the arrival of the New York train. From the back of the runabout dangled the reed-like, moth-eaten legs of Cornelius Twombley. For him, too, the re-

turn of the master was a joyous occasion; there would be a quarter for him if he had been a good boy, and some inner voice evidently was telling him that he had. There was a red-and-white-striped camellia in his buttonhole, and his narrow body was beautified by a dirty white waistcoat.

The New York train whistled. Lucy flicked the horse with the whip, three handsome hatless heads were jerked backward, Cornelius Twombley's peanut-shaped head was jerked forward, the voices of Jock and Hurry made noises like excited tree frogs, and away they all flew toward the station.

It was easy to picture the beaming faces that John Fulton could see when he got off the train; it was easy to hear the happy joyous voices all going at once, that would greet him. If there was trouble in his life he would forget it in those moments.

I turned into the Aiken Club feeling a little lonely. How good, I thought, it would be to be met, even once, as Fulton is being met.

And now I must set down things that I did not know at this time, and only found out afterward. And other things that are only approximately true, things that wouldn't happen in my presence, but which I am very sure must have happened.

When Lucy drove off at such a reckless pace to get to the station before the train, I don't think it even occurred to her that during his absence her feelings for her husband had changed in any way. It was he, I think, who was the first to know that there was a change. He did not realize it at the station or on the way home. How could he with Jock and Hurry piled in his lap, and both talking two-forty, and Lucy at his side, trying to make herself heard and even understood? No man could. It must have been shortly after he got home, at that moment, indeed, when he was alone with her, and his arms went out to her with all the love and yearning accumulated at compound interest during absence. Habit, and the wish to hurt no one, must have carried her arms to tighten a little about him, and to lift her lips to him. Then I think she must have turned her head a little, so that it was only her cheek that he kissed. I imagine that until that time Fulton's love-making had always found the swiftest response, that with those two passion had always been as mutual and spontaneous as passion can be; and that now, perhaps the very first time, his fire met with that which it could not kindle into answering flame.

I do not think that he at once let her go. I think that first his arms that held her so close loosened (already the pressure had all gone out of hers). I think she was sorry they had to loosen, and glad that they had. Then his arms must have dropped to his sides. He did not at once turn away, but kept on looking at her, as she at him—he, hurt, he did not know why, but brimming with love and compassion and tenderness and a little desperate with the effort to understand and to make allowances for whatever might have to be understood. Her great blue eyes looked almost black for once, prayer upon prayer was in their depths, they were steady upon his and unfaltering. It was as if she was giving him every opportunity to look down through them and see what was in her soul.

It could not have been till many days later that a whole sequence of episodes which hurt and could not be understood forced him into speech. I think he must suddenly in a moment of trial, have come out with something like this:

"Why, Lucy, it sometimes seems as if you didn't love me any more."

When she didn't answer, it must have flashed

through him like a streak of ice-cold lightning that perhaps she really didn't.

I am glad that it is only in imagination that I can hear his next question and her answer. There must have been a something in his voice from which the most callous-hearted would have wished to run, as from the deathbed of a little child.

"*Don't* you, Lucy?"

And how terribly it must have hurt her to answer that question! Considering what he had been to her and she to him, for how long a period of time neither had been able to see anything in this world beyond the other, and considering with even more weight than these things their own children for whom the feelings of neither could ever really change, I think that Lucy ought to have lied. I think she ought to have lied with all her might and main, lied as John Fulton would have lied if the situation had been reversed, and that thereafter, until his death or hers, she ought to have acted those lies, with unflagging fervor and patience. Tenderness for him she never lost. She might, upon that foundation, have built a saintly edifice of simulated love and passion.

But it was not in her nature to lie. I think she

probably said: "I don't know. I'm afraid not." And then I think her sad face must have begun to pucker like that of a little child going to cry, and I think it is very likely, so strong is habit, that she then hurried into her husband's arms and had her cry upon his breast.

574624 A

XI

I IMAGINE that thereafter for a time John Fulton's attitude toward Lucy was now dignified and manly, and now almost childlike in its despair. Having made her love him once, he must have felt at first that he could make her love him again. I imagine him making love to her with all the chivalry and poetry that was in him, and then breaking off short to rail against fate, against the whole treacherous race of women, perhaps, and to ask what he had done to deserve so much suffering? "Why didn't you do this to me when I was proposing? Why did you wait till I was stone broke and worried half sick, with everything going from bad to worse? Is it anything I've done, anything I've failed to do? Why, Lucy, we were such a model of happiness that people looked up to us. How can anybody suddenly stop caring the way you have? If it had been gradual! But you were in love with me the night I went away, weren't you? *Weren't* you?"

Here he catches her shoulders and forces that

one admission from her, and makes the great praying woebegone eyes meet his. Then, almost, he pushes her away from him.

"And I go away for a few days," he cries, "and come back and everything is changed. I who had a sweetheart, haven't even a wife. Why have you changed so? There must be a reason? What is it? Are you sick? Have you eaten something that has made you forget? Have you been bewitched? That's no fool question. Have you? Have you?"

"Have I what?"

"Have you been bewitched? Tell me, dear, who has done this thing to you?"

Again he has her by the shoulders.

"Lucy, is there someone? Never mind the other things, just tell me that? You've gotten to like someone else? Is that it?"

And Lucy must have answered that there was no one else. And there is no question but that to the best of her belief and knowledge she was telling the truth.

But the mere thought that there might be someone else had moved Fulton as he had never been moved before. He once told me that even as a little boy he had never in all his life known one pang of jeal-

ousy. He will never be able to make that boast again. And like some damned insidious tropical malaria, the passion has taken root in his system, so that only death can wholly cure him.

Like some vile reptile it had found within him some cave from which it might emerge to brandish its hideous envenomed horned head, and into which betimes it might withdraw.

I can imagine no one so stupid as to question any serious statement of fact that Lucy might make. Her eyes were wells of truth; her voice fearless and sure, like that of some kingly boy.

So when she said there was *no one,* Fulton, who knew her far better than anyone else, believed her without any question. And a great weight must have been lifted from his heart. With the truth that he had wrung from her, I think he must have rested almost content for a few hours.

But contentment is far off from a man who hears the great edifice of love and happiness which he has reared, crashing about his ears.

He could not make up his mind to any definite course of action. Now, calm and judicial, I hear him discussing matters with coolness, and self-forgetfulness.

"If there is any chance for me, ever," he would say, "it would be silly of us to take any action which would be final. And, besides, I don't see how I could reconcile my conscience to giving you a divorce. Or you yours to getting one. It would be hard enough for you to lie about the most trifling thing. You couldn't, you simply couldn't face the court and tell them that I had been cruel and unfaithful. You couldn't accuse me of anything so gross, and so unlike me, as the other woman who would have to be hired for the occasion. There's another side to it. I think the children are better off with you than with me. You're the best mother that ever was, the most sensible and the most careful. But I don't think I could give them up. If you and the babies were all three to drop out of my life, I'd have nothing left but the duty of finding money to support you. There's a certain pleasure in doing your duty, of course, but in this case hardly enough. Honestly, dear, with never a sight or touch of you, I simply couldn't keep things going long."

Then perhaps Lucy asked some such question as this: "Don't people often, when they've stopped caring about each other, go on living together just the same, as far as other people know? And real-

ly just be good friends and live their own lives?"

"This is very different. We haven't stopped caring about each other. You've stopped caring about me. I care about you, just as I did in the beginning, and always shall. We *couldn't* lead separate lives under the same roof. God knows I feel old enough, but I'm still a young man, and like it or not, you are still my wife. It is something to own the shell that once contained the pearl."

Another time he goes hurrying through the house, prayer-book in hand, a thumb marking the marriage ceremony. He has been brooding and brooding and snatching at straws.

"Read this, Lucy. Just look it over. It's what you and I stood up and promised before a lot of people. I'm glad I looked it up. You'll see right away that it's a contract which nobody could have the face to break. I want you to read it over to yourself."

Finally she does, just to please him, in the sad knowledge that no good will come of it.

"You'd forgotten, hadn't you? But just see what you promised. Didn't you mean to keep these promises when you made them?"

"Oh, of course I did. Why ask that?"

" 'It's what you and I stood up and promised before a lot of people.' "

"But now you want to back out."

Then the old argument that a promise which one is powerless to keep isn't a bona fide promise and cannot be so regarded. Fulton sees that for himself presently.

"No, of course," he says. "If you don't love me, you can't make yourself by an effort of will. And if you don't honor me . . ."

"You *know* I do."

"How about the other thing, the promise to obey? That is surely in your power to keep."

She admits that she can keep that promise; but she leaves herself a loophole. She does not say that she *will* keep it.

And so the words of the prayer book shed no light on the situation, and I shouldn't wonder if Fulton raged against the book, and flung it into a far corner, and was immediately sorry.

For a man situated as Fulton was, some definite plan of action is necessary; and to my mind the one that would be best would be one in which the least possible consideration for the woman should be shown. When Lucy began to play clench-dummy with her own life, with her husband's love, and with the institution of marriage, Fulton, I think, would

have made no mistake if he had stripped her to the skin and taken a great whip to her.

Her whole life had been one of self-indulgence. She had indulged herself with Fulton's love till she was glutted with it; that she was the mother of two children may, perhaps, be traced to self-indulgence, and surely it must be laid down to self-indulgence that she was not the mother of more than two. Her self-indulgence kept Fulton poor and in debt, and it had come to this: that her impulse to self-indulgence would now stop at nothing unless circumstances should prove too strong for it.

It is not the gentle, faithful, self-sacrificing man who keeps his wife's love; it never was. It was always the man who had in him a good deal of the brute.

But, except in a moment of insanity, a man does not go against his nature. Fulton has too good a brain not to think that if Lucy were locked up for a week or so, and fed on bread and water, good might come of it. But his was not the hand to turn the key in the lock. He could no more have done it than he could have struck her. This sudden failure of her love for him was only another evidence of that wastefulness and extravagance which had so often

hurt him financially. Surely it must have occurred to him more than once to publish notices in the newspapers to the effect that he would only be responsible for his own debts. He must, I think, have threatened the thing from time to time, knowing in his heart that he could never bring himself to put it into execution.

I wonder how Fulton felt when hard upon the knowledge that she no longer loved him, he received the bill for the dance which she had given against his wishes, and in full knowledge of his present financial predicament?

She had treated him so badly that it is a wonder of wonders that he kept on loving her.

For one thing they deserve great credit. Even Evelyn Gray, a guest in the house, did not know that there was any trouble between them. All she thought was that owing to financial and other worries, which time would right, Fulton seemed a little graver and less enthusiastic than usual.

Nor was I any wiser. I had not, of course, so many chances of seeing the two together, but I saw as much of Lucy as ever, for we rode together nearly every day.

XII

IF nothing more definite had come of all this, I should now see but little significance in those long afternoons of riding with Lucy. She could leave the substance of her trouble behind, as easily as she could have left a pair of gloves, and she took into the saddle with her only a shadow of the tragedy that was glowering upon her house.

I see now, that, at this time, we must have begun to talk more seriously and upon more intimate topics; that we laughed less and that there were longer silences between us. We began to take an interest in the trees and flowers among which we rode, to learn their names, and to linger longer over those which did not at once strike the eye.

And I see now that Lucy talked more than usually about her husband. It was as if by doing constant justice to his character she hoped to make up to him for her failure of affection. In his domestic relations he was a real hero by all accounts. Didn't I *think* they lived nicely? She thought so, too, but it wasn't her fault. She was so extravagant, and

such a bad manager, it was a wonder they could live at all. She admitted so much with shame. But if I could understand how it is with some men about drink, then it must be easy for me to understand how it is with some women about money. Oh, she'd spent John into some dreadful holes; but he had always managed to creep out of them. How he hated an unpaid bill! It wasn't his fault that there were so many of them. For her part (wasn't it awful!) they filled her neither with shame nor compunction. And he'd been so fine about people. His instinct was to be a scholar and a hermit. But she loved people, she simply couldn't be happy without them, and (wasn't it fun?) she had had her way, and now John liked people almost as much as she did. And he had a knack of putting life and laughter into the simplest parties.

Sometimes when we had finished riding, we had tea in the garden. It would be turning cool, and she would slip a heavy coon-skin coat over her riding things; and there was a long voluminous polo-coat of John's that I used to borrow. Evelyn nearly always joined us, John not so often. Sometimes Dawson Cooper came. He was getting over his shyness. Sometimes he was quite brazen and face-

tious. It looked almost as if he was being encouraged by someone.

Of the sorrow that was gnawing at John Fulton's heart I saw no sign. He was alert, hospitable, humorous often, and toward Lucy his manner was wonderfully considerate and gentle. If I had guessed at anything, it would have been that the wife was in trouble and not the husband. He could not sit still for long at a time, but he did not in the least suggest a man who was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. His activity and sudden shiftings from place to place and from topic to topic were rather those of a man who superabounds in physical and mental energy.

At this time he did not know whether he and Lucy were going to separate or not. If they should, he was already preparing dust to throw in the world's eyes. He let it be known that at any moment he might have to go to Messina in the interests of his cartridge company (this was a polite fiction) and that he might have to be gone a long time. Business was a hard master. He had always tried to keep it out of his home life, but in times like these a man must be ready to catch at straws.

And Lucy, just her head and fingers showing from

the great coon-skin coat, would give him a look that I should not now interpret as I did then. I thought that it made her feel sick at heart even to think of his going to some far-off place without her!

"Speaking of far-off places," I said once, "Gerald Colebridge is taking some men to Burlingham to play polo. He's asked me, and I'm tempted almost beyond my strength. What does everybody think?"

"I'd go like a shot," said Dawson Cooper. "Gerald will take his car and everything will be beautifully done; and California just about now!" Here he bunched his fingers, kissed them and sent the kiss heavenward.

"Wish *I* was asked!" exclaimed Evelyn.

"Ever been to California?" Fulton asked. "Because if not, go. And still I've thought sometimes that spring in Aiken is almost as lovely."

Poor fellow, it must have been quite obvious that he didn't think so any more. But then Evelyn, Dawson, and I were blind and deaf, at this time.

"When," said Lucy at last, "would you go, if you go?"

"Why, in a day or two," I said. "I'd probably leave day after tomorrow on the three o'clock and join the party in New York."

"Oh, dear," she said, "I'll have to take up golf then. You're the only man in Aiken who likes to ride. And John won't let me ride alone."

"Why not," said he, "ask me to ride with you?"

"Oh, I know you'd do it," she said. "You're a hero, but I'm not quite such a brute."

I wish I could have gone to California.

I rode with Lucy the next afternoon, for the last time as we both thought. As we came home through Lover's Lane, the ponies walking very slowly, she leaned toward me a little, turned the great praying eyes upon me, and said, her mouth smiling falteringly:

"Please don't go away. I hate it. Everything's gone all wrong with the world. And if you're not my friend that I can talk to and tell things to, I haven't one."

"Are you serious, Lucy?"

"Oh, it's no matter!" she said lightly, and began to gather her reins, preparatory to a gallop.

"It's only that it didn't seem possible that you could need one particular friend out of so many. Of course, I stay. Will you tell me now what it is that's gone all wrong?"

"Yes," she said with a quickly drawn breath.

"I've had to tell John that I don't love him any more, and don't want to be his wife."

If one of those still and stately pines which lend Lover's Lane the appearance of a cathedral aisle had fallen across my shoulders, I could hardly have been more suddenly stunned.

When I looked at her the corners of her lovely mouth were down like those of a child in trouble.

"Please don't look at me," she said.

We rode on very slowly in silence. Sometimes, without looking, I could not be sure that she was still crying. Then I would hear a little pathetic sniffling—a catching of the breath. Or she would fall to pounding the thigh with her fist.

But she pulled herself together very quickly and borrowed my handkerchief and when we reached the telegraph office her own husband could not have known that she had been crying.

She held my pony while I telegraphed Gerald Colebridge that I could not go to California with him.

Far from looking like one who had recently been crying, she looked a triumphant little creature, as she sat the one pony, and held the other. The color had all come back to her face, and she looked—why, she looked happy!

XIII

"WELL, my dear," said my mother; "we shall miss you."

"Oh," I said, "I've given it up. I'm not going."

As she had said that she would miss me, this answer ought to have given my mother unmixed pleasure. It didn't seem to. She smiled upon me with the greatest affection, and at the same time looked troubled.

"When you came into my room this morning your mind was definitely made up. Has anything happened?"

"Only that I've changed my mind. Aiken is too nice to leave."

"I sometimes think," said my mother, "that the life you lead is narrowing. At your age, how I should have jumped at the chance to see California in spring! But I shan't ask you why you don't jump. I know very well you'd not tell me."

"Must I have a reason? They say women don't have reasons for doing things. Why should men?"

"A woman," said my mother, "does nothing without a reason. But often she has to be ashamed of her reasons, and so she pretends she hasn't any. Men are stronger. They don't have to give their reasons, and so they don't pretend."

"Maybe," I said, "I'm fond of my family and don't want to be away from them."

My mother blushed a little, and laughed.

"I shall pretend to myself," she said, "that that is why you have given up your trip. But I'm afraid it isn't your father and me that you've suddenly grown so fond of."

"Now look here, mamma," I said, "we thrashed that all out the other day."

"Thrashed all what out?—Oh, I remember—your attentions to Lucy Fulton, or hers to you, which was it?"

"It wasn't our attentions to each other, as I remember. It was the attention which Aiken is or was paying to us."

"So it was," said my mother.

She gave me, then, a second cup of tea, and talked cheerfully of other things. Some people came in, and I managed presently to escape from them.

It hadn't been easy to tell my mother that I had

given up the California trip. I knew that her triple intuition would connect the change of plan with Lucy Fulton, and I was not in the mood to meet such an accusation with the banter and levity which it no longer deserved.

Like it or not, I was staying on in Aiken because Lucy had asked me to. That we had been gossiped about had angered me; but it could do so no longer. That we were good friends, and enjoyed riding and being together, was no longer the whole truth. There was in addition this: that Lucy no longer loved her husband, and that she had made me her confidant.

From the first to the last of my dressing for dinner that night, everything went wrong. I stepped into a cold tub, under the impression that I had told my man to run a hot one. He had laid out for me an undershirt that had lost all its buttons, and a pair of socks that I hated. I broke the buckle of the belt that I always wear with my dinner trousers; I dropped my watch face downward on the brick hearth, and I spilled a cocktail all over my dress shirt, *after* I had got my collar on and tied my tie!

Usually such a succession of misadventures would have given rise to one rage after another. But I was

too busy thinking about Lucy. I could no longer deny that she attracted me immensely. Perhaps she had from the beginning. I can't be sure. But I should never have confessed this to myself, or so I think, if I had not learned that she had suddenly fallen out of love with her husband. In that ideal state of matrimony, in which I had first gotten to know her, she had seemed a holy thing upon a plane far above this covetous world. But now the angel had fallen out of that which had been her heaven, and come down to earth. That I had had anything to do with this, I should even now have denied to God or man with complete conviction. I had no interest in the causes of her descent, only in the fact of it. And all that time of bungling dressing for dinner I kept thinking, not that I should help her look for a new heaven, but that I must try, as her true friend, to get her back into her old one. At that time John Fulton had no better friend than I. It seemed to me really terrible that things should have gone wrong with these two.

My father came in while I was still dressing.

"Hear you've given up California," he said bluntly; "do you think that's wise? . . . Where do you keep your bell?"

I showed him.

"How many times do you ring if you want a cocktail?"

"Twice. If you'll ring four times I'll have one with you. I spilt mine."

So my father pushed the bell four times and complimented me on my love of system and order, and then he returned to his first question.

"Do you think it wise?"

"Well, father," I said, "we've always been pretty good friends. Will you tell me why you think it isn't wise?"

"Yes, I will," he said; "I think it's foolish for a man to run after women in his own class for any other purpose than matrimony."

"So do I!" said I.

"A man," he persisted, "doesn't always know that he is running after a woman. Nature will fool him. Look at young lovers! Why, they actually believe in the beautiful fabric of spiritual poetry that they weave about each other. And nature lets 'em. But men who have seen life, and have lived, as I shouldn't be at all surprised if you had, for instance, are able to see the ugly mundane facts through the rosy mist. My boy, you and Lucy Fulton are be-

ing talked about. You don't have to tell me it's none of my business, I know that. But I can't help wanting you to steer clear of rows, and I don't want to see any woman get mud thrown on her because of you. For a man of course, unfortunately, consequences never amount to much. It's for the woman that I should plead if I had any eloquence or persuasiveness. I'd say to you, don't run away for your own sake, that's not worth while; but run away for hers. Now you will forgive me, my dear fellow, won't you, for butting in like this. . . ."

The cocktails came, and when the man who brought them had gone, I said:

"It's for her sake that I'm staying, father; will you listen a little? You're the only man in the world that I can talk to without fear of being repeated. As far as going to California is concerned I *was* going—until a late hour this afternoon. I felt more concern at leaving my mother than anyone else. You believe that?"

He nodded to what was left of his cocktail.

"Lucy and I may have been talked about, but there was absolutely no reason why we should have been. We rode together this afternoon and out of a clear sky she told me that she had fallen out of love

with her husband—for no *reason* at all, that's the worst of it—and she doesn't know what to do, and has no friend she feels like talking to about it, except me. That's why I'm staying. She *asked* me not to go. And of course I said I wouldn't."

My father finished his cocktail, and blew his nose.

"Oh," I said, "I'm not infatuated with the situation either."

"Women certainly do beat the Dutch!" said my father. "I suppose she wants advice, and backing when she doesn't follow it."

"If I can keep her in the path of her duty, father, be sure I will."

"And if you can't?"

"It's a real tragedy," I said. "They were the happiest and most loving couple in the world, except you and mother, and only a short time ago."

"What time is it?" asked my father.

"I've broken my watch."

"Well, it doesn't matter if we are a little late for dinner."

He cleared his throat, and turned a fine turkey-cock red, and looked very old-fashioned and handsome.

"I never thought to tell you this," he said; "it's

like throwing mud on a saint. Once your mother came to me and said she didn't love me any more and that she loved another man and wanted to go away with him."

"I feel as if you'd kicked my feet out from under me."

"It doesn't seem to have come quite to that with Lucy, but it may, and in some ways the cases are parallel. I took counsel with your grandfather. He advised me to whip her. When I refused to do that, he gave less drastic advice, which I followed. I told your mother and the man that if after a year during which they should neither see each other nor communicate they still wanted each other, I would give your mother a divorce. I don't know when they stopped caring about each other. I think it took your mother less than three months to get over him. And if he lasted three weeks, why I'm the dog that—he was."

I detected a ring of passionate hatred in my father's voice.

"So she came back to me," he said presently, "in a little less than a year. Your little sister was your mother's offering of conciliation. And we have lived happily. But things have never been with us quite

as they were. I have never known if your mother really got to loving me again, or if she has raised a great monument of simulation and devotion upon a pedestal of shame and remorse. Even now, if I drink a little more than is good for me, she never criticizes. She feels that she has forfeited that prerogative."

"What became of the man?"

"He died of heart failure," said my father, "in a disreputable place. They tried to hush it up, but the facts came out. When I heard of it, I plumped right down in a chair and laughed till I was almost sick. I knew what he was," he said with sudden savageness, "all along. But there is no making a woman believe what she doesn't want to believe. He was fascinating to women, and a cur. He kept his compact with me, not because of his given word, but because he was physically afraid of me."

"Thank you for telling me all this, father," I said; "I like you better and better. But in one way the cases aren't parallel. In Lucy's case there is no other man."

"Not yet," said my father; "but when a woman no longer loves her husband, look out for her. She has become a huntress—she is a lovely sloop-of-war

that has cleared her decks for action. . . . Are you ready?"

I slipped my arm through my father's and we went downstairs together.

"I'm sorry you're mixed up in this," he said; "but you couldn't go when she made a point of your staying. I'm obliged to you for telling me."

XIV

IT grew very warm during the evening and windy. By bedtime there was a hot, lifeless gale blowing from the southeast. Now and then the moon shone out brightly through the smother of tearing clouds, and was visible for a moment in all her glory, only to be submerged the next moment and blotted out. About two o'clock single raindrops began to splash so loudly on the veranda roof just outside my window that the noise waked me; after that I only slept fitfully, and my ears were never free from the loud roaring of the tropic rain that began presently to fall upon Aiken. I dreamed that somebody had stolen the Great Lakes and while being hotly pursued had dropped them. All day it rained like that, and all the following night, and only let up a little the afternoon of the second day. I got into an oilskin then and walked out to the Fultons'.

Theirs was a nervous household. Jock and Hurry confined indoors for nearly two days had had too little exercise and too many good things to eat.

They were quite cross and irrepressible. John had the fidgets. He couldn't even stay in the same room for more than a minute, and he wouldn't even try sitting down for a change. Lucy had had to give up at least a dozen things that required dry weather and sunshine. She seemed to take the rain as something directed particularly against herself by malicious persons. Evelyn, also cross and nervous, was on the point of retiring to her own room to write letters. Just then Dawson Cooper telephoned to know if she cared to take a little walk in the rain and she accepted with alacrity.

"It's gotten so that he only has to whistle," said Lucy petulantly, when Evelyn had gone. "I think she's made up her mind to be landed."

Fulton came and went. Every now and then he dropped on the piano-stool for a few moments and made the instrument roar and thunder; once he played something peaceful and sad and even, in which one voice with tears in it ran away from another.

The piano was in the next room, and whenever it began to sound, Lucy dropped her work into her lap and listened. At such time she had an alert, startled look. She resembled a fawn when it hears a stick snap in the forest.

We heard him leave the piano, cross the hall and go into the dining-room.

"He's hardly touched his piano in years," said Lucy. "But now he's at it in fits and starts from morning till night. Night before last when the rain began he got up and went down in his bare feet and played for hours. I had to fetch him and make him come back to bed."

Then she seemed to feel that an explanation was necessary. She bent rosily over the work, and said: "We don't want the servants to know."

Again the piano began to ripple and thunder. Again we heard John go into the dining-room.

I must have lifted an eyebrow, for Lucy said:

"Yes. I'm afraid so, but it doesn't seem to go to his head. Oh," she said, "it wrings my heart, but I haven't the right to say anything."

"Lucy," I said, "have you thought out anything since I saw you last?"

"I think in circles," she said; "one minute I'm for doing my duty to him, the next minute I can only think of myself. It *can't* be right for me to be his wife when I've stopped being—Oh, anything but awfully fond of him."

"You *are* that?"

"Of course I am."

"It's just about the saddest thing that ever came to my knowledge," I said; "and you won't be angry if I say that I think you ought to stick to him and make the best of it?"

"You're not a woman. No man understands a woman's feeling of degradation at belonging to a man she doesn't love. Oh, it's an impossible situation. And I can't see any way out. I *couldn't* take money from John, if I left him; I haven't got a penny of my own. And I think it would kill me to go away from Jock and Hurry for long. And the other thing would just kill me."

"That," I said, "Lucy, I don't believe."

"You don't know. Not being a woman, you *can't* know."

"Men," I said, "and women too survive all sorts of things, mental and physical, that they think *can't be* survived. I read up the Spanish Inquisition once for a college essay, and the things they did to people were so bad that I was ashamed to put them in, and yet lots of those people survived and lived usefully to ripe old ages."

"Who did?"

Unheard by us, John had finished in the din-

ing-room and had come to pay us a flying visit.

"People that were tortured by the Spanish Inquisition," I said.

"A lot they know about torture," said he. "They only did things to people that the same people could imagine doing back to them. Nothing is real torture if you can see your way to revenge it—if only in imagination. Torture is what you get through no fault of your own from somebody you'd not torture back for anything in the world. It's what sons do to mothers, husbands to wives, wives to husbands. Isn't that so, Lucy?"

"I suppose so," she said very quietly, her head bent close to her work.

"But what," exclaimed John, "has all this to do with the high cost of living?"

He would neither sit down nor stand still. He moved here and there, changing the positions of framed photographs and ash trays, lighting cigarettes, and throwing them into the fire. He had the pinched, hungry look of a man who is not sleeping well, and whose temperature is a little higher than normal.

"Were you in the Spanish War?" he asked me suddenly.

(At the moment I was thinking: "If you go on like this you'll never win her back, you'll only make matters worse!") I said: "In a way, but I didn't see any fighting. I got mixed up in the Porto Rico campaign."

"I was with the Rough Riders," he said; "I've just been remembering what fun it all was. I wish you could go to a war whenever you wanted to, the way you can to a ball game."

Then as quickly as he had introduced war, he switched to a new subject.

"I want you to try some old Bourbon a man sent me."

He had crossed the room, quick as thought, and pushed a bell; when the waitress came he told her to bring a tray.

"Isn't whiskey bad for you when you're so nervous?" said Lucy quietly, and without looking up.

"I don't know," said John, with a certain frolicking quality in his voice; "I'm trying to find out."

"What was that you were playing a while ago?" I asked. "The slow, peaceful, sad sort of thing."

"This?" And he whistled a few bars.

I nodded.

"I made it up as I went along," he said; "music's like a language. When a man's heard a lot of the words and the idioms he can make a bluff at talking it; but I can only speak a few words. I've only got a child's vocabulary. I can only say, 'I'm hungry,' or 'I'm sleepy,' or 'I want a set of carpenter's tools,' or 'Brown swiped my tennis bat and I'm going to punch his head,' or 'The little girl over the fence has bright blue eyes and throws a ball like a boy and climbs trees.' "

He had to laugh himself at the idea of being able to express such things in musical terms, but when he had sponged up a long glass of very darkly mixed Bourbon and Apollinaris, the picture of the little girl over the fence must have been still in his mind, for having left us abruptly for the piano, he preluded and then began to improvise upon that theme. He talked rather than sang, but always in tune and with the clearest enunciation, and any amount of experience.

He began merrily, and in no time had us both laughing; I think the first air which he tortured to fit his unrhymed and unrhythmical words belonged once to Mozart, but I am not sure. It was made out of merriness, sunshine, and dew.

"The little girl over the fence, the fence
Has bri-i-i-ight blue-ooo eyes
And throws a ball like a boy, a boy,
And cli-i-i-i-i-i-imbs trees."

He repeated in the minor, modulated into a more solemn key, and once more talked off the words. He left you with a slight feeling of anxiety. You began to be afraid that the little girl would fall out of the trees and hurt herself. But no, instead he grabbed something by the hair right out of a Beethoven adagio, and began to want that little girl with the blue eyes as a little girl with blue eyes has seldom been wanted before; she became Psyche, Trojan Helen, a lover's dream; all that is most exquisite and to be desired in the world—and then suddenly he lost all hope of her and borrowed from Palestrina to tell about it, and the last time she climbed trees it was plump on up into Heaven that she climbed, and from hell below, or pretty close to it, there arose the words "And climb trees" like a solemn ecclesiastical amen.

It was an astounding performance, almost demoniac in its cleverness and in its power to move the hearer.

Lucy's eyes were filled with tears.

"I wish he wouldn't," she said.

There was quite a long silence, but as we did not hear him moving about, he probably sat on at the piano, for presently, in a whisper, you may say, more to himself than to us, he sang that Scotch song, "Turn ye to me," which to my ear at least stands a head and shoulders taller and lovelier than any folk song in all the world, unless it's that Norman sailor song that Chopin used in one of the Nocturnes.

"The waves are dancing merrily, merrily,
Ho-ro, Whairidher, turn ye to me:
The sea-birds are wailing, wearily, wearily,
Horo Whairidher, turn ye to me.

"Hushed be thy moaning, love bird of the sea,
Thy home on the rocks is a shelter to thee;
Thy home is the angry wave, mine but the lonely grave,
Horo Whairidher, turn ye to me."

Lucy rose abruptly and left the room. I could hear her whispering to him, pleading.

Surely he must have sung that song to her when she was only the little girl with blue eyes over the fence, and it must have had something to do with making her love him. But the qualities of his voice

that could once make her heart beat and fire her with love for him could do so no more. He had left, poor fellow, only the power to torture her with remorse and make her cry.

XV

THE next day I kept a riding engagement with Lucy, but she didn't.

"She's gone for a walk with John," said Evelyn, who had come out of the house to give me Lucy's messages of regret and apology.

"Lucy gone walking!" I exclaimed. "Have the heavens fallen?"

"Sometimes I think they have," said Evelyn. "But you know more about that than I do."

"Know more about what?"

"Haven't you noticed?"

I shook my head.

"Why, John is all up in the air about something or other, and Lucy is worried sick about him. I thought probably she'd told you what the trouble was. I've asked. She said probably money had something to do with it; and that was all I could get out of her. Come down off that high horse and talk to me. I'm not riding till four."

So I left my pony standing at the front gate and Evelyn and I strolled about the grounds.

"Money isn't the whole trouble," said Evelyn presently. "I know that. Something even more serious has gone terribly wrong. And I want to help."

"Won't they work it out best by themselves?" I suggested.

"Sometimes," she said, "it seems almost as if they had quarreled. Sometimes John looks at her—Oh, as if he was going to die and was looking at her for the last time. Could he have something serious the matter with him?"

"He could, of course, but it doesn't seem likely."

"He doesn't *look* well."

"True."

"Look here, Archie, don't you know what's wrong?"

"I wish I did," said I. "If I could right it."

As a matter of fact I didn't know what was wrong. I knew only that Lucy no longer loved her husband. But why she no longer loved him was the real trouble, and she had not told me that, even if she knew it herself. But wishing to strengthen my answer, I said: "You're the one who ought to know what's wrong. You're on the spot. And besides, you're a woman and a woman is supposed to have three intuitions to a man's one."

Evelyn ignored this.

"Sometimes," she said, "John is so gentle and pathetic that I want to cry. Sometimes he is cantankerous and flies into rages about trifles. It's getting on my nerves."

"Why not pack up your duds and move on?"

"Oh, because——"

I laughed maliciously. "We might move on together," I suggested.

"*You* were going to move on," she said, "but you have stayed. I wonder why?"

I did not enlighten her.

"If," she said presently, "people find out that things in this house are at sixes and sevens I wonder if they won't find fault with you and Lucy? Has that occurred to you?"

"It has occurred to you," I said, "to my own mamma and doubtless to other connections. But it hasn't occurred to me. We see too much of each other?"

"Altogether."

"You really think that?"

Evelyn shrugged her shoulders. "For appearance' sake, yes," she said. "Of course you do. But it's my opinion that if you'd been going to get sentimental

about each other you'd have done it long ago."

"Evelyn," I said, "I've never made trouble in a family."

"Is that because of your natural virtue or because you have never wanted to?"

"A little of both, I think. People fall in love at first sight. That can't be helped. Or they fall in love very quickly, and that's hard to help. But people who fall in love gradually through long association have no good excuse for doing so, if they oughtn't. They should see it coming and quit seeing each other before it's too late."

"But I don't agree," said Evelyn. "I think love is always a first-sight affair. I don't mean necessarily the first time two people see each other, but that suddenly after years of association even, they will see each other in a new light."

"A light that was never on sea or land?"

"A light that is always where people are, just waiting to be turned on."

At that moment we heard Dawson Cooper's voice calling: "Hallo there! Where are you?"

Presently he hove into sight, and did not seem altogether pleased at finding Evelyn and me together.

"Archie thought he was going to ride with Lucy," Evelyn explained, "but she threw him down, and I suppose we have got to ask him to ride with us!"

"Yes," I said, "I think you have, but I don't have to accept, do I? You're just doing it so's not to hurt my feelings, aren't you? Of course if you really want me——"

"Come along, Coops," said Evelyn. "He's trying to tease us. He wouldn't ride with us for a farm."

We separated at the mounting-block, and I watched them a little way down the road. And felt a little touch of envy. Evelyn was looking very alluring that afternoon.

I rode in the opposite direction until I came to the big open flat north of the racetrack; there, a long way off, I saw John Fulton and Lucy walking slowly side by side. John was sabering dead weed stalks with his stick. So I turned east to avoid them, then north, until I had passed the forlorn yellow pesthouse with its high, deer-park fence, and was well out in the country.

Then I left the main road, and followed one tortuous sandy track after another. Suddenly Heroine shied. I looked up from a deep, aimless reverie,

and saw sitting at the side of a trail a withered old negress. She looked like a monkey buried in a mound of rags.

"Evening, Auntie," I said.

"Evening, boss."

Heroine had broken into a sweat, and was trembling. She kept her eyes on the old negress and her ears pointed at her, her nostrils widely dilated.

"My horse thinks you're a witch, Auntie," I said. "Hope you'll excuse her."

"I allows I got ter, boss, caze that's jes what I is."

"Honest to Gospel?" I laughed.

"You got fifty cents, boss?"

I found such a coin in my pocket and tossed it to her.

"I used to have," I said.

She rose to her feet and Heroine drew away from her, firmly and rudely.

"Don' min' me, honey," said the old woman, and she held out a hand like a monkey's paw. To my astonishment Heroine began to crane her head toward the hand, sniffed at it presently, gave a long sigh of relief and stood at ease, muscles relaxed, and eyelids drooping.

"Now I believe you," I said. "What else can you do?"

She turned her bright, beady eyes this way and that, searching perhaps for anyone who might be watching and listening. Then she said, "I kin tell fo'tunes, boss."

"Just tell me my name."

"You is Mista Mannering, boss."

"Hum, that's too easy," I said. "I've been coming to Aiken a great many years. What is my horse's name?"

"Her name is He'win, boss."

"Hum," I said and felt a little creepy feeling of wonder.

"Does you want to know any mo'?"

I nodded.

"You's flighty, boss, but you ain't bad. You is goin' ter be lucky in love, 'n then you is goin' ter be unlucky. You is goin' ter risk gettin' shot, but dere ain't goin' ter be no shootin'. When summer come around you is goin' ter have sorrer in you' breas', and when winter comes around dere'll be de same ole sorrer, a twistin' and a gnawin'."

"What sort of a sorrow, Auntie?"

"Sorrer like when you strikes a lil chile what ain't

done no harm, only seem like he done harm, sorrer like you feels w'en you baby dies, 'case you is too close-fisted ter sen' fer de doctor, sorrer like——"

She broke off short, looking a little dazed and foolish.

"You've had your share of sorrow, Auntie, I can see that."

"Is I a beas' o' de fiel'?" she exclaimed indignantly, "or is I a humanous bein'?"

"Must all human beings have sorrows?"

"Yes, boss, but each has he own kin'! Big man has big sorrer, little man have little sorrer, and dem as is middlin' men dey has middlin' sorrers."

"It's all one," I said, "each gets what he can stand and no more. Put a big sorrow on a little man and he'd break under it; put a little sorrow on a big man and he wouldn't know that he was carrying it. What else can you tell me, Auntie?"

"I ain't goin' ter tell yo' no mo'."

"Not for another half-dollar?"

"No, boss."

"Well, there it is anyway. Good evening."

"Good evening, boss."

She had made me feel a little shivery and I rode off at the gallop.

XVI

I WAS surprised to find John Fulton in the Club. As a home-loving man he was not a frequent visitor. He had dropped in, he said, to get a game of bridge, had tired of waiting for somebody to cut out, and had been reading the newspapers to find out how the world was getting along.

"I haven't more than glanced at them in a week," he said, "but there's nothing new, is there? Just new variations of public animosity and domestic misfortunes. Have you read this Overman business?"

"I haven't."

"It's a case or a hard-working, thoroughly respectable man who, for no reason that is known, suddenly shoots down his wife and children in cold blood, and then blows his own head to smithereens."

"But of course there was a reason," I said; "he must have felt that he was justified."

"He seems to have had enough money and good health. And he passed for a sane, matter-of-fact sort of fellow."

"If it was the regular reason," I said, "jealousy, he wouldn't have hurt the children."

"Only a very unhappy man could kill his children," said Fulton. "His idea would be to save them from such unhappiness as he himself had experienced. But in nine cases out of ten it would be a mistaken kindness. Causes similar to those which drove the father into a despair of unhappiness would in all probability affect the children less. No two persons enjoy to the same degree, suffer to the same degree or are tempted alike. How many wronged husbands are there who swallow their trouble and endure to one who shoots?"

"Legions," I said. "Fortunately. Otherwise one could hardly sleep for the popping of pistols."

"Do you believe that or do you say it to be amusing?"

"I think that the number of husbands who find out that they have been wronged is only exceeded by the number who never even suspect it. But they are not the husbands we know, the modern novelist to the contrary notwithstanding. In our class it is the wives who are wronged as a rule; in the lower classes, the husbands. I've known hundreds of what the newspapers call society people; the women are

good, with just enough exceptions to prove the rule: the men aren't."

"When you say that the women are good, you mean they are technically good?"

"Who is technically good?"

"Hallo, Harry!"

Colemain, having pushed a bell, pulled up a big chair and joined us.

"We were saying that the average woman we know is technically good."

"You bet she is!" said Colemain. "She has to be! If she wasn't how could she ever put over the things she does put over? And as a rule her husband isn't technically good and so she has power over him. She says nothing, but he knows that she knows, and so when she does something peculiarly extravagant and outrageous, he reaches meekly for his checkbook. For one man who is ruined by drink there are ten ruined by women; and not by the kind of women who are supposed to ruin men either; not by the street-walker, the chorus girl or the demi-mondaine. American men are ruined by their wives and daughters who are technically good. Don't we know dozens of cases? When there is a crash in Wall Street how many well-to-do married

men go to smash to one well-to-do bachelor? A marriage isn't a partnership. It's the opposite except in name. It's a partnership in which the junior partner gives her whole mind to extracting from the business sums of money which ought to go back into it. And she spends those sums almost invariably on things which diminish in value the moment they are bought. It isn't the serpent that is the arch enemy of mankind. It's the pool in which Eve first saw that she was beautiful, or would be if she could only get her fig-leaf skirt to hang right."

"But I think," said Fulton gently, "that women ought to have pretty clothes, and bright jewels and luxuries. If a girl loves a man, and proves it and keeps on loving him, how is it possible for him to pay her back short of ruining himslf? Haven't you ever felt that if the whole world was yours to give you'd give it gladly? Why complain then when afterwards you are only asked to give that infinitesimal portion of the world that happens at the moment to be yours? If a man is ruined for his wife, if cares shorten his life, even then he has done far, far less than he once said he was willing and eager to do."

He looked at the big clock over the mantelpiece,

sat silent for a moment, then rose, wished us good-night and went out.

"You wouldn't think," said Harry, "to hear him talk that a woman was playing chuck-cherry with that infinitesimal portion of the world that happens to be his. I was in the bank this morning and I saw him come out of the President's room. He looked a little as if he'd just identified the body of a missing dear one in the morgue."

"I'm afraid he is frightfully hard up," I said, "but he hasn't said anything to me about it, and I don't like to volunteer."

"He's a good man," said Harry, "one of the few really good men I know, and it's a blamed shame."

"Oh, it will all come out in the wash."

"It depends on how dirty the linen is!"

"American men," I said, "never seem to have the courage to retrench. Why not take your family to a cheap boarding-house for a year or two? Cut the Gordian knot and get right down to bed rock? Boarding-house food may be bad for the spirit, but it's good for the body. My father had dyspepsia one spring, and his doctor told him to spend six weeks in a summer hotel—*any* summer hotel—and take *all* his meals in it."

Just then one of the bell-boys interrupted us. He said that Mrs. Fulton wished to speak with me. He followed me into the coat room, where the telephone is, in a persistent sort of way, so that I turned on him rather sharply and asked what he wanted.

His eyes were bulging with a look of importance and his black face had an expression of mystery. "She ain't on de telephone," he said, "she's outside."

"Well, why couldn't you say so?"

I went out bareheaded into the dusk and walked quickly between the bedded hyacinths and the evergreen hedges of Carolina cherry to the sidewalk. But she wasn't there. Far up the street I saw a familiar horse and buggy, and a whip that signaled to me.

She was all alone. Even Cornelius Twombley, as much a part of the buggy as one of the wheels, had been dropped off somewhere.

"I haven't seen you all day," she said. "I thought maybe you'd like to go for a little drive."

I simply climbed into the buggy and sat down beside her.

"Evelyn and Dawson," she explained, "were crowding the living-room, so I thought of this. Is John in the Club?"

"He was, but he said good-night to Harry Colemain and me, and I think he went home. . . . How is everything? I saw you and John from afar, walking together. I knew you could run because I've seen you play tennis, but I didn't suppose you'd ever learned to walk. You're always either on a horse or behind one."

"Was it very bold of me to come to the Club for you? I suppose I ought to have telephoned." Then she laughed. "I ought to have had more consideration of your reputation," she said.

"My reputation will survive," I said. "But look here, Lucy——"

"I'm looking!"

"I meant look with your mind. I don't know if I ought to bring it up; it's just gossip. Harry saw John coming out of the President's room in the bank. He said it looked to him as if John had been trying to make a touch and hadn't gotten away with it. You know I hate to see him distressed for money, especially now when other things are distressing him, and I wonder if there isn't some tactful arrangement by which I could let him have some money without his knowing that it came from me."

"*Aren't* you good!" she exclaimed. "Oh, I sup-

pose he makes things out as bad as he can so as to influence me as much as possible; but he says we are in a terrible hole, that we oughtn't to have come here at all, that if he'd had any idea how much money I'd been spending in New York before we came he wouldn't have considered coming, that everybody is hounding him for money, and that he doesn't see how he can possibly pay his bills at the end of the season. Of course it's mostly my fault; but I can't help it if the Democrats are in power and business is bad, can I?"

"Well," I said, "I'm flush just now and I'll think up a scheme. Meanwhile let's forget about everything that isn't pleasant. Where are you going to drive me?"

"I don't care. Let's get away from the lights. What time is it? John doesn't like me to be late; and besides I haven't kissed the kiddies good-night. Let's just take a little dip in the woods. On a hot night it's almost like going for a swim. Oughtn't you to have a hat or something? If you get cold you can put the cooler on like a shawl."

Her manner affected me as it had never affected me before.

The dip from the hot dusk of the dusty road into

the cool midnight of the pine woods had all the exhilaration of an adventure. The fact that she had sent into the Club for me flattered my vanity. She wanted me and not another to be with her. I felt a tenderness for her that I had never felt before. I wanted a chance to show that I understood her and was her friend without qualification. Shoulder touched shoulder now and then and it seemed to me as if I was being appealed to by that contact for support, countenance, and protection.

We chattered about the night and the pale stars, and the smells of flowers. We wished that there was no such thing as dinner, that the woods lasted forever, and that we might drive on through the soft perfumed air until we came to the end of them.

Then there was quite a long silence, and for the first time in my life I experienced the wish, well, not to kiss her, but to lay my cheek against hers. It was a wish singularly hard to resist.

"I suppose we ought to turn back."

"You know best," I said.

"Do you want to?"

"No, do you?"

"No."

But we turned back and came up out of the woods into the lights of the town.

"Where shall I drop you—at the Club?"

"Let me drop you," I said, "and borrow your buggy afterward to take me home. You ought not to drive alone at night."

"Maybe it would be better if I did," she said.

We said good-night at the door of her house, but not easily. For once it seemed hard to say anything final.

"Was I very brazen," she said, "to ask you to go with me, when I didn't want to be alone?"

"You were not," I said, "it was sweet of you. I loved it."

Cornelius Twombly lunged from the black shadow of a cedar tree and went to the horse's head.

"Good-night, Lucy. Good luck!"

Just then we heard John calling.

"That you, Lucy? You're late. I was getting anxious."

We could see him coming down the path, a vague shadow among the shadows, his cigarette burning brightly.

"Hallo, who is it? I can't see."

"It's Archie Mannering," said Lucy.

"Oh, is it? Won't you come in?"

"Can't, thanks. Got to dress. Lovely night, isn't it? Good-night. Good-night, Lucy."

When I had driven a little way I turned and looked over my shoulder, but though I could only see the fire of John's cigarette, I imagined that I could see his face—a little puzzled, a little anxious, and very sad.

It was on that same night that he said to Lucy: "Aren't you seeing a good deal of Archie Mannering?"

And she answered:

'Am I? I suppose I am. I like him awfully."

XVII

I AWOKE the next morning with the feeling that something or other was impending. I had no idea what it might be, pleasant or unpleasant. I felt a little the way you feel just before a race on which you have bet altogether too much money, a little excited, a little nervous, equally ready for laughter or anger. I had also the feeling that I had a great many things to do, and could not possibly get them done in so short a space of time as one day.

I hurried through breakfast. I hurried through the papers. And then I realized with a sense of anti-climax that until four o'clock, when I was to ride with Lucy, I had but one thing of any possible importance to do. And upon that business from first to last including the walk to the village and thence to the Club I spent no more than three-quarters of an hour. It had been an eccentric piece of business, and I was rather pleased with myself for having brought it to a satisfactory conclusion. But I wanted others to know what I had done and to be

pleased with me for doing it; and to tell anyone was quite out of the question.

In the Club letter-box under "M," I saw a small gray envelope. Instinct told me that it was for me, and that it was from Lucy. Then somehow all my feeling of restlessness and suspense melted away like a lump of sugar in hot tea. I felt at once serene and comfortable.

I carried the note to a writing-table, for I imagined that it would require an immediate answer, and then read it. Like all Lucy's notes it began without the conventional endearment, and ended with initials. It contained also her usual half-dozen mistakes in spelling.

John says he has no money and can't get any. So we've got to close the house and go back north, and live very cheaply till better times. So I've got to begin packing. So I can't ride this afternoon. Isn't it all a beastly shame? But please drop in and say how-dy-do just the same, and don't mind if you have to sit on a trunk. And please be a little sorry because I'm going away and we can't have any more rides. And please don't say anything about this; because John isn't just himself and maybe when we get all packed up he'll change his mind. L. F.

Long before they were "all packed up," John did change his mind. I was present when he changed

it. Lucy, Evelyn, and I were in the living-room helping each other to pack large silver-framed photographs into the tray of a trunk. It was slow work. During the winter none of us had looked at the photographs or commented on the originals, but now that they were to be swathed in tissue paper and put out of sight each one had to be approved or disapproved, and long excursions had to be made into the life histories and affairs of the friends who had sat for them.

Lucy had just taken a large photograph of Evelyn from the top of the low bookshelves that filled one end of the room when John came in from the garden with an open letter in his hand. He was smiling in a puzzled sort of way.

"What do you know about this!" he exclaimed rather than asked.

"Nothing," said Lucy, "*yet.*" And she began to wrap Evelyn's photograph in many folds of tissue paper.

"Yesterday," said John, "I tried to get some money from the bank, but they turned me down. Now they write that upon reconsideration I can have anything I like."

Well, Lucy's expression at that moment was

worth a great deal more than the few thousands which her husband would see fit to borrow from the bank, and I couldn't but feel that there are moments when it is really worth while to be alive and rich.

"Wonder what made 'em change their minds?" said John.

"There's one thing sure," said Lucy. "You are not to look a gift horse in the mouth."

She unwrapped the photograph of Evelyn and put it back in its old place on top of the bookshelves.

"This settles everything, does it?" asked John. "We don't go back to New York?"

"We do not," said Lucy firmly.

"Well," said John, "I'd better see the bank before it changes its mind again. Is the buggy outside?"

"No, but you can take Archie's or Evelyn's. Can't he? I sent Cornelius Twombly to do some chores."

"I'll drive you down," said Evelyn, "having a telegram to send."

"And I'll stay and help Lucy unpack," I said. "Lord, people, I'm glad you're not going!"

The moment we were alone Lucy said: *"You* did it."

"Did what?"

"Don't beat about the bush! Don't pretend that you are not a blessed angel in disguise!"

Her face was very grave and lovely.

"It's the kindest, tactfulest thing that anybody ever did."

"I couldn't bear the thought of your going back to the city when it's such fun here."

"What can I say or do to thank you?"

"Nothing, Lucy. Yes, you can. You can ride with me this afternoon."

She looked a little troubled. "Last night, after you had gone," she said, "John said, 'Aren't you seeing a good deal of Archie Mannering?' "

For a moment I felt distinctly chilled and uncomfortable. Then I said: "Oh, dear! Now Brutus himself is beginning to worry about us. How silly!"

"How silly!" echoed Lucy, and we stood staring at each other rather vapidly, finding nothing to say.

After a while I asked if John had said any more on the subject. "Did he embroider the theme at all?" I asked.

Lucy took a photograph out of the trunk tray and began to unwrap it. "Yes," she said. "He did. He even held forth. He said that when a woman no longer cared for her husband, it was dangerous for her to see much of another man. He realized, he said, that ours was an exceptional case, but that soon people would guess about *him* and me, and that then they'd begin to talk about *you* and me. And he hates anything conspicuous, and so forth, and so forth."

"What did you say?"

She smiled up at me, but not very joyously. "I said, 'I'm not going to be rude to one of the best friends I've got, just for fun. If you forbid me to see him, why I suppose I'll obey you, but I'd have to explain to him, wouldn't I? I'd have to say, "John considers our friendship dangerous, so we're not to see each other any more!" ' And of course he said that that was out of the question, and I agreed with him."

"Still you've said it."

And we smiled at each other.

"He didn't give me a good character," said Lucy dolefully. "He said I never think of yesterday or tomorrow, but only of the moment. He said I

neglect the children, and Oh, I'd like to end it all! It's an impossible situation. I'd give my life gladly to feel about him the way I used to, but I can't—I can't ever."

She looked very tragic.

"Oh," she went on vehemently, "it's terrible. I'm all cold and dumb. Every power of affection that I had has gone out like a candle. I *do* neglect the children! It's because I can't look them in the face. I've failed him, and I've failed them, and I ought to tie a stone round my neck and jump into the nearest millpond."

"It's a good three miles to the nearest millpond," I said. "And there isn't a stone in this part of South Carolina. You are all up in the air now, because the situation you are in is so new to you. But you'll get used to it."

"If I don't go mad first."

"Why, Lucy?"

"You don't understand," she cried. "You have never had loving arms to go to when you were in trouble. I've had them and I've lost them. I mean I've lost the power to go to them and find comfort."

A picture of her running to my arms for comfort

flashed through my mind, and troubled me to the marrow. And I had from that moment the definite wish to take her in my arms. And in that same moment I realized that those who thought we were too much together were not such meddling fools as I had thought them.

"Lucy," I said, and I hardly recognized my own voice. "Whatever happens, you've a friend who will never fail you."

"I know that," she said, and she held out her two hands, and I took them in mine.

"If you sent for me to the ends of the earth, I would come."

"I know that."

"There is nothing you could ask of me that I wouldn't give."

"I know that."

And that afternoon we rode together in the woods.

XVIII

A MAN must have descended to the very deepest levels of depression before he loses his power to laugh, or to be cheered by an unexpected bettering of his financial position. John Fulton was in a bad way, but certain things still struck him as funny, and the money which he had been enabled to borrow from the bank had eased his mind. Still, so Lucy told me, he could not sleep at night, and it must have been obvious to the most casual observer that he was a sick man. He had a drawn and hungry look. Jock and Hurry could by no means satisfy his appetite for affection. Indeed, I think the sight and touch and the sounds of them at play were no great comfort to him at this time. He must have felt in their presence something of that anguish of pity which a man feels for children who have lost their mother.

He had hoped at first that Lucy's failure of affection was but a temporary aberration. But at last he must have come to despair of any change in her feelings for him, at least under existing conditions.

Indeed their relations were going from bad to worse. A man loved and beloved falls into habits of passion for which there is no cure but death or old age. Yet a man would readily believe that separation might affect him like an opiate, and it must have been in this belief that Fulton determined to accompany Harry Colemain on a trip to Palm Beach. To me he vouchsafed the explanation that he was not well and that he couldn't sleep, and that when he wasn't well, and that when he couldn't sleep, his one thought and desire was to get to salt water. "It always cures me," he said, just as if he had often been sick before. From Lucy I had the truth of the matter.

"He thinks," she said, "that if he goes away and stays away for a long time that perhaps I will miss him enough to want him back, and on the old footing. He isn't even going to write to me. It's going to be exactly as if he didn't exist."

"Do you think it wise for him to go, Lucy?"

"Perhaps it will do him good. It won't change me. I know that. If only he'd change. Haven't I done him enough harm to make him hate me? Archie, I'm so sorry for him that I wish I was dead. And yet I want to live. I'm too young to die. I

want to live, and be happy—happy the way I used to be happy."

"And you can't with John?"

She shook her head quietly. "It's the most wonderful thing to be in love!" she said. "I wonder what I did to have that wonderful thing? I wonder what I've done to deserve to lose it? And even if—even if it happened again it could never be the same. There can be only one first time—even if you've got a silly memory that doesn't remember very well. And you make ties and habits and all these have to be thrown overboard when the second time happens, and there's scandal, and cold shoulders, and—what do you think I *ought* to do? If I can't give him what he's paying for oughtn't I to cut loose on my own, to support myself, and not be a burden to him and a ubiquitous reminder that we've failed to make a go of living together? What *ought* I to do?"

It had become very hard for me to tell her what I thought she ought to do. Ever since that moment when I had first known that I wanted to take her in my arms and comfort her, I had begun to have doubts of my own honesty. And now she had put that honesty to a definite test, and I was determined that it should come through the ordeal alive.

"Must I really tell you what I think you ought to do?"

"Yes."

"Some of the things I think you ought to do, are things that I know you don't want to do—things that you think perhaps you *can't* do. Women often say *can't* when they mean *won't*, don't they?"

"Maybe."

"I'm afraid you aren't going to like what I'm going to say, nor me for saying it."

"Try me," she said, and she gave me a look of great trust and understanding.

"I'm going to tell you what I think you ought to do, Lucy, and what I think you ought to have done."

Any teacher whose scholars looked at him with the trustfulness and expectation with which Lucy now looked at me, must be inspired, I think, to the very top notch of his sense of honor and duty. I am sure at least that I laid the law down of what I thought she should do, and should have done with complete honesty and without regard to consequences. If I got nothing better for my pains than dislike, at least I could criticize her conduct and character without being biased by my growing affection for her.

"In the first place," I said, "when you found out that you no longer loved your husband, you made your first mistake. By your own admission he had given you everything in the way of devotion and faithfulness that a man can give a woman. When you found that you no longer loved him, you shouldn't have told him. He ought never to have known. You should have summoned all your fortitude and delicacy to deceive him into thinking that you had not changed toward him, and never would."

"I *couldn't!*" exclaimed Lucy.

"You wouldn't," I said.

"It wouldn't have been honest."

"Perhaps not. But it would have been noble."

Lucy naturally enough preferred praise to blame, and this showed in her face and in her voice. I felt infinitely removed from our previous terms of intimate confidence, when she said: "Couldn't or wouldn't, it's history that I didn't."

"That being so," I said, "I think you should go now to your husband and tell him that love or no love you propose to be his faithful wife till death part you; to put him first in your head, if not in your heart. It may be that through a long course of simulation you will come once more to care for him.

Self-sacrifice is a noble weapon. I think, Lucy, that you would be very wise if you told him that two is not a lucky number."

"I don't understand."

"Jock and Hurry," I said, "are two."

She changed color to the roots of her hair. "Oh," she cried, "you don't understand how a woman feels about that! I'd rather die. I—I *couldn't!*"

"You *won't.*"

"I thought *you* understood me better. I thought *you* wanted me to be happy!"

"Upon my soul, Lucy, I think that you might find happiness that way."

She shrugged her shoulders and her face looked hard as marble. "And that's your advice!" she said. And then with a sudden change of expression, "It's what you think I *ought* to do. Would it please you if I took your advice? Is it what you *want* me to do?"

I had spoken as I thought duty commanded. It hadn't been easy. With each word I felt that I had lost ground in her estimation. She asked that last question with the expression of a weary woe-begone child, and I answered it without thought, and upon the urge of a wrong impulse.

"No—no," I cried. "It's not what I want you to do. I had almost rather see you dead."

There was a long silence.

"Do you mean that?"

"Yes, Lucy. Yes."

"Then you *do* care. Oh, thank God!"

I don't know how she got there. It was as if I had waked up and found her in my arms.

Kissed and kissing, we heard the opening of the distant front door. And Oh, how I wish I had found the courage when Fulton came into the living-room, to tell him that I loved his wife, and that she loved me, and what was he going to do about it! I did have the impulse, but not the courage. When Fulton came in Lucy was knitting at an interminable green necktie, and I was talking to her from a far chair across an open number of the illustrated *London News*. We looked, I believe, as casual and innocent as cherubim, but my conscience was very guilty, and it seemed to me, rightly or wrongly, that for the first time Fulton showed me a certain curtness of manner, as if he was not pleased at finding me so often in his house.

XIX

WITH the knowledge that I loved Lucy and that she loved me, came also the knowledge that for a long time the situation had been inevitable—inevitable if we kept on being so much in each other's company. Passages between us of words and looks now recurred to my memory filled with portentous meaning. Oh, I thought, how could I have been so blind! A fool must have seen It coming. I ought to have seen It coming. I ought to have run from it as a man runs from a conflagration. When Lucy told me that she no longer loved her husband I ought to have known that the fault was mine, and I ought to have gone to a far place, and left that little family to rehabilitate itself in peace. Surely after a "blank" spell Lucy would have loved her husband again.

But all the thoughts that I carried to bed with me that night were not dark with remorse. It was possible for whole minutes of time, especially between sleeping and waking, to forget the complications of the situation and to bask in the blissful

warmth of its serenities. The laughter, the prayers, the adoration of Lucy's lovely eyes were mine now. She loved me better than her children, better than life itself. She had not said these things to me, she had looked them to me. It was wonderful to feel that I had been trusted with so much that was beautiful and precious.

Once a spoiled child, always a spoiled child. In the scheme of things I *would* not at first give their proper place to those awful barriers which society has set up between a man and another man's wife. We loved each other with might and main, and our only happiness could be in passing over those barriers and belonging to each other. John Fulton and his children were but vague pale shadows across the sunshine.

The sleep that I got that night, short though it was, was infinitely refreshing. I waked with the feeling that happiness had at last come into my life, and that I was not thirty-five years old, but twenty years young.

I walked in my mother's garden waiting for servants to come downstairs and make coffee for me and poach eggs. It was going to be a lovely day. Already the sun had coaxed the tea-olives to give out

their odor of ripe peaches. "How *she* loves them," I thought. "If only she were with me now."

The garden seemed very beautiful to me. For the first time in my life, I think, I took a flower in my hands and examined it to see how it was made. A great and new curiosity filled me. How beautiful the world was, and all things in it; how short the time to find out all that there was to be known about all those beautiful things! And what an ignoble basis of ignorance I must start from if I was to "find out," and to "understand!" There filled me a sense of unworthiness and a strong desire for self-improvement.

"I must learn the names of some of these things," I thought, and I began to read the labels which stood among the flowers and shrubbery, for in such matters my mother was very strict and particular: *Abeleia grandiflora, Laurestinus, Olea fragrans, Ligustrum napalense, Rosa watsoniana*—— Now really could that thing be a rose? It looked more like a cross between a fern and an ostrich plume. I looked closer. Each slender light green leaf was mottled with lighter green, a miracle of exquisite tracing, and the thing was in bud, millions and millions of buds no bigger than the eggs in a

shad roe. Yes, it was a rose. I looked at the drop of blood on the ball of my thumb, and thought what a beautiful color it was, and how gladly, if need be, I would shed every drop of it for Her.

Dark smoke began to pour from the kitchen chimney, and I knew that the cook was down. Hilda must have seen me in the garden, for she was setting a place for me at one end of the big dining-table. How fresh and clean she always looked and how tidy. Almost you might have thought that her hair was carved from some rich brown substance. It was always as neat as the hair of a statue.

"Good morning, Hilda."

"Good morning, Mr. Archie."

"How about breakfast?"

"It will be ready directly."

"Wish you'd give me a long glass of Apollinaris with a lot of ice in it."

"With pleasure."

I heard her pounding ice in the pantry and then the pop as the bottle came open. She stood behind my chair while I drank. And somehow I got the feeling that she was smiling. I turned my head quickly. She was smiling, but tremulously, almost as if she was going to cry.

"What's the matter, Hilda—have I forgotten to brush the back of my hair?"

"No, sir—it's——"

"It's *what?*"

"Nothing, sir—only——"

"Don't be silly—— Tell me."

She told me, and for a moment, so odd was her statement, I thought she must have gone out of her mind.

"The window of my room," she said, "is just over one of the windows of yours."

I didn't know what to say. I really thought she must be slightly deranged. I said lamely: "Which window?"

"The one by your bed, the one you always leave open so's the air can get to you."

"Well, Hilda, what about it?"

"Sometimes I hear you talking in your sleep, and then I lean out of my window and listen."

With this admission she blushed crimson and no longer looked me in the eyes.

"Do you think that's quite fair?"

"I don't lead a very full life, Mr. Archie."

"And my unconscious prattle helps to fill it? Do I often talk in my sleep?"

"You talked last night."

Her voice was full of meaning and somehow I felt chilled and no longer so very gay and happy.

"What did I talk about?"

"About a lady."

With humiliation I realized that I was now turning red; but I laughed, and said: "We look like a couple of boiled lobsters, Hilda. What did I say about the lady?"

"You said—I only thought you ought to know that I know—so's—well so's you can keep that window shut, and fix it so no one else will know."

I felt like a convicted criminal.

"Did I—mention the lady's name?"

She nodded. "You were talking about Mrs. Fulton," she said in a low voice, "only you didn't call her that."

"Hilda," I said firmly. "Mrs. Fulton and I are very old friends—nothing more."

I could see that she didn't believe me, and I changed my tactics. "You'll not talk, Hilda?"

Her face had resumed its natural color, and she now looked me once more in the eyes. "I'd sooner die than hurt you, Mr. Archie."

"Why, Hilda——!"

All this time I had been sitting and talking over my shoulder, but now I got quickly out of my chair, and drew her hands away from her face. "Oh, Hilda, I *am* so sorry. What *can* I do? I'm so sorry, Hilda, and so proud, too."

She looked up at that.

"You poor child! I feel like a dog, a miserable dog!"

"You couldn't help it, Mr. Archie. You can't help being you. Can you?"

She tried to smile.

"How long," I asked, "has it been like this?"

"Ever since the day I came—three years and two hundred and twenty-one days ago—and I heard you say to Mrs. Mannering—to your mother—'Mother,' you said, 'that new maid is as pretty as a picture.' And that did it!"

"Hilda," I said as quietly as I could, "I'm more touched and flattered than I can express. I'll be a good friend to you as long as I live. But—I think I ought to say it, even if it's a cold rough thing to say. I don't believe I'm ever going to feel the same way about you, and so——"

"Oh, I know that, but—— Oh, do you still think I'm pretty?"

"*Indeed* I do. I've always thought that. Always known that."

"Well," she said, speaking very bravely but with a mouth that quivered, "that's something. I don't lead a very full life, but that's something."

XX

MOTHER, are you very busy with those letters?"

"Yes, dear, very."

"I thought so; so put them down and come into the garden. There is a bench where the thyme and eglantine——"

"My dear, you frighten me. What has happened?"

My mother rose, one hand on her bosom.

"Nothing to be frightened about. It's only a little tragedy in a life that isn't very full. Come and talk it over."

I gave her my arm and we strolled into the garden like a pair of lovers.

"Do you remember when Hilda came to us?"

"Perfectly."

"I said to you on that day, 'Mother, the new maid is as pretty as a picture.' Do you remember?"

"No."

"Well, I said it, and Hilda heard me say it, and please don't laugh, it seems that my saying it made

the poor child—Oh, care about me. She's cared ever since, and I'm afraid she cares a whole lot."

"How did you get to know?"

"She told me, this morning, practically out of a clear sky. One thing I want to make clear is that it's just as little my fault as it possibly can be. I feel like the devil about it, but I can't for the life of me find one little hook to hang a shred of self-reproach on. My morals aren't what they should be. But I am a fastidious man, and the roof under which my mother lives is to me as the roof of a temple. But you know all this. Now what's to be done? One thing is clear, I can't and won't be amorously waited on. I think the poor child will have to be sent away."

"Oh, dear!" cried my mother, "and just when she's getting to be a perfect servant, and your father so used to her now—says he never knows when she's in the room and when she isn't."

We returned to the house.

"I'll talk it over with her," announced my mother, "and try to decide what's best—best for her, the poor, pretty little thing."

You may be sure that that meeting in the little room where my mother wrote her letters was no

meeting between a mistress and a servant, but between two honest women who in different ways loved the same man.

I was with Lucy while it took place, but certain gists of what was said and done have come to me, some from my mother, and some from Hilda.

My mother, it seemed, waived at once all those degrees of the social scale which separated them, took Hilda in her arms, kissed her, and held her while Hilda had what women call a "good cry." My mother is too proud and brave to cry, but she was unhappy without affectation. After the embrace and the cry they sat side by side on a little brocaded sofa and talked. My mother fortunately did not have to point out the social obstacles in the way of a match between Hilda and me, as there was never any question of such a match. Indeed, in the talk between them I was not at first mentioned. My mother took the position that Hilda was just a sweet, nice-minded girl who was very unhappy and needed comforting, and advice. First she made Hilda tell the story of her life. To be permitted to do this in the presence of a sincere listener and well-wisher is one of the greatest comforts to anyone.

"The poor child," said my mother, "has had such

a drab, colorless, unhappy life that it made her almost happy to tell about it."

It seemed that Hilda wasn't "anybody" even for a servant. Her earliest recollections were of life in an English orphanage—one of those orphanages where the mothers of the orphans are still alive and there never were any fathers.

"But she's made herself think," my mother told me, "that her father was a gentleman—God save the mark!"

Well, she went into service when she was a "great" girl of fourteen or fifteen, and after various drab adventures in servitude came to this country and was presently sent to my mother on approval. She had left her last place in England because of a horrible butler. He was bowlegged and very old. He drank and made the poor frightened girls in the house listen to horrible stories. One found notes, printed notes, pinned on one's pincushion. "Have a heart. Don't lock your door tonight," and such like. Or a piece of plate would be missed and one would find it in one's bureau drawer, where the horrible old man had put it, and one dared not complain to the master lest upon carefully planned circumstantial evidence one be made out to be a thief.

It had been so wonderful coming to live in my mother's house. The servants were so different, so kind, so worthy. The servants' rooms were so clean and neat and well-furnished as the master's rooms. So much was done to make the servants comfortable and happy. Nobody had ever spoken crossly to one in my mother's house—— "And, Oh, Mrs. Mannering, I feel so low and ashamed to have made so much trouble for you and Mr. Archie."

That was the first mention of my name.

"My dear Hilda, you mustn't feel ashamed because you've had a romance."

"Oh, it *has* been a sort of romance, hasn't it, Mrs. Mannering? But I never—never should have let it all come out. Because now I'll have to go away, and never even see him ever any more. I never should have let it come out, but I couldn't help it. And him always so kind and polite, and never once guessing all these years!"

Now my mother had not gone into that interview without a definite plan. She had heard that the Fultons—of all the people in this world whom it might have been!—were being abandoned by their waitress, and already by a brisk use of the telephone my mother had secured the place for Hilda.

It's a wonder that Hilda did not burst out laughing or screaming when she heard into whose service she was to go. I don't think she hated Lucy—yet. But for a woman who loved a man to take a place with the woman the man loved must have struck her as the most grotesque of propositions. But what could she do? Loyal to me, and to my secret, she wasn't going to give me away to my mother.

"But," she protested, "Mr. Archie goes so much to that house!"

"But now," said my mother, "don't you see, he won't go so much."

Indeed the dear manager felt that she had killed two birds with one stone. Lucy had a good place, and from now on there would be in the Fultons' house a living reason why a man of tact (like her beloved son!) should keep away. Alas, mother, there were other living reasons in that house which should have served to keep me away, and didn't.

I heard from my mother of the arrangement and was troubled. For once in her life of smoothing out other people's lives she had blundered seriously. Her measures had in them only this of success: that I found many excuses for not taking meals in the Fultons' house, and from that time forward saw

Hilda very seldom. My mother gave her a lot of clothes, and quite a lot of money, I suppose, and the poor child for a while dropped out of sight. But not out of mind, I can tell you; for it worried me sick to feel that she was always in Lucy's house, watching and listening when she could.

I had not at this time had any great experience with the passion of jealousy. But a man who reads the newspapers, or has done his turn at jury duty in Criminal Sessions, cannot be ignorant of the desperate acts to which now and again it drives men and women.

Hilda, according to the slight knowledge I had of her character, was gentle and patient; she would be treated by Lucy as all Lucy's servants were, with the greatest tact and friendliness, and still the mere fact of her presence in that house filled me with forebodings. She would be in a position to make *so much* trouble, if ever anything should happen to start her on the war path. She had proved already that her moral nature was not superior to eavesdropping; already she had my secret by the ears, and one-sided and innocent though that secret may have appeared to her, it was not really a one-sided secret, and when she had got her clutch upon the

other side, she could be almost as dangerous and mischievous as you please.

At best, Hilda was one more difficulty with which Lucy and I would have to contend.

It would have been wisest to tell Lucy all that I knew about Hilda. But you may have noticed with butterflies that they do not fly the straight line between two points; rather they fly in circles, with backtracking, excursions, and gyrations, so that unless you have seen them start you cannot guess where they have started from, nor until the wings close and the insects come to a definite rest, are you in a position to know what their objective was.

In the face of our recently declared love for each other, any mention of Hilda's below-stairs passion for the "young master" seemed to me a blatant indelicacy. Almost it might have a quality of pluming and boasting, a gross acceptance of man's polygamous potentialities.

There would be time later for conversations in which future practicalities should take precedence over romantic fancies and protestations. Just now the Butterfly did not care a rap what should happen when winter came; for the present the world was filled with flowers—all his, and all containing honey.

XXI

"HE broke up their home," is a familiar phrase. But few men in the act of breaking up a home realize the gravity of what they are about. I had gone a long way toward breaking up Fulton's happy family life without having the slightest notion that I was doing anything of the kind. When Lucy fell out of love with her husband, it was not because she had fallen in love with me. It was because she was going to. The lovely little sloop-of-war was merely clearing her decks for action. She didn't know this; I didn't. I frequented the house a little more than other men; that was all. And I frequented it not because of the charm exercised upon me by an individual member of the Fulton family, but of the charm which it exercised upon me as a whole. *There* was peace, *there* was happiness, *there* was love and understanding; there was poignant food for a lonely bachelor to chew upon. Remembering this how can I believe that this is the best of all possible worlds, and that everything in it is for the best? If I had not been

fascinated by the Fultons as a family, I should never have become a frequenter of their house. If I had not been a frequenter of their house, I should never have split that family which as a whole so fascinated me with a wedge of tragedy. It is a horrid circle of thought.

When I learned that Lucy no longer loved her husband my heart had given no guilty bound of anticipation; instead it had turned lead-heavy for sheer sorrowing and sunk into my boots. The other day the Germans smashed the blue glass in Rheims Cathedral. A friend brought me a little fragment of this, and among my personal possessions I give it the place of first treasure. It's a more wonderful blue than Lucy's eyes, even. The light of heaven has poured through it to illumine the face of Joan of Arc. Its price is far above rubies and sapphires, and it seems to me the most wonderful treasure to have for my very own. But does this fact automatically make me glad that the Germans banged the great cathedral to pieces? It does not. Sometimes when I look at the light through my piece of blue glass I see red. And I hope that those who trained guns against the holy shrine and who are not already in hell, soon will be. And I could wish myself the

hell of never having known Lucy's love, if by so doing I could restore the Fulton family to the blessed and tranquil state in which I first knew them.

I began this chapter with an idea of self-defense. How much of the tragedy am I responsible for? Upon my soul I can never answer that question to my satisfaction, and my conscience has put it to me thousands of times. I ought to have seen it coming. I didn't—at least I'm very sure that I didn't. But sometimes I am not so very sure of this. It is so obvious (now) that I ought to have seen it coming, that sometimes I persuade myself that I actually did. But how could I? For if I had, with any certainty at all, surely I would have been man enough to hide myself away somewhere, even at the ends of the earth. Love does not grow and wax great upon air. Solid food is needed in the occasional presence of the beloved. Suppose I had fled away the moment I learned that Lucy no longer loved her husband? Already her heart must have been turning to me, if only a little, but with the magnet which had caused it to turn that little removed from sight, first, and presently from mind, I believe that after a dazed numbed period that heart of hers might have swung back into its place.

Later when Fulton said to me, "But you ought to have seen it coming, and taken measures to see that it didn't come," I gave him my word that I hadn't seen it coming, and it was very obvious that he didn't believe me. Will anyone believe me? It doesn't matter. I am not even sure myself that I am telling the truth. But I know that I am trying to.

I had left my mother to her interview with Hilda, and betaken myself to the club. It was too early even to hope for a sight of Lucy. There were a number of men in the reading-room discussing the morning leader in that fair-minded and pithy sheet, the *Charleston News and Courier,* and one of these, eyeing me with a quizzical expression, said: "You look as if you had won a bet."

So already *it* showed in my face.

Well, I felt as if I had won many bets, and was only twenty, and that the course before me was all plain sailing. I was not yet in a condition to argue with myself about right and wrong. It did not seem worth while to look into the serried faces of difficulties and think how I could burst through them. It was more natural on that first morning after the discovery to look boldly over their heads to the rich open and peaceful country beyond.

A line from the "Brushwood Boy" kept occurring to me, "But what shall I do when I see you in the light?"

What should I do, what would Lucy do? Would there be people about or would we have the good luck to meet alone? Did she still love me, or had the dark night brought council and a change of heart? I knew that it hadn't. We were as definitely engaged to each other as if there was no husband in the way, no children, no law, no convention, no nothing. I was idiotically happy.

One thing only troubled me a little. Had Lucy's impulse to precipitate frankness already started any machinery of opposition into action? Had she told her husband? Knowing her so intimately, I could not make up my mind, but would have been inclined to take either end of the bet.

Suppose she had told him?

Wouldn't she give me a word of warning so that I could be prepared for anything he might say to me at our first meeting? I thought so, but could not be sure.

"If he does know," I thought, "I don't want to see him. Why don't I want to see him? Am I afraid of him? I am not afraid of him physically.

I am stronger than he and more skillful, and I am not afraid of him mentally. He has a better mind than I have, but that is nothing to be afraid of. Well, then, why don't I want to see him? Oh, because it will be awkward and disagreeable; because he will look sick to death and irreparably injured. Because he will not do me justice, because he will think it is all my fault; and because he will require of me things which I shall not promise him."

I heard the telephone ringing in the distance. My heart bounded and I knew that Lucy was asking for me. I had risen and half crossed the room to meet the boy who came to tell me that I was indeed wanted on the phone. My heart began to thump in my breast, like a trunk falling downstairs. I glanced guiltily to see if the rumpus it seemed to me to be making was attracting notice. No. Every man was sunk in his newspaper. A moment later, I heard her voice in my ear.

"Listen, I'd like to see you. I'll be dressed and downstairs in ten minutes. Evelyn and John have driven to the golf club to get John's sticks. He's really going to Palm Beach. They start sometime soon after lunch. . . . How do I feel? . . . Oh, about the same as yesterday!"

I cannot describe the thrill of emotion which I managed to abstract from that last phrase. About the same as yesterday! I, too, felt like that, only more so.

"Good-by—for ten minutes."

She hung up suddenly. But I could not at once leave the telephone room. It seemed to me that I must be visibly trembling from head to foot.

My buggy was at the club door. First I drove home, raced up the stairs to my room, and from a closet in which I keep all sorts of hunting and fishing gear, snatched a fine deep-sea rod by Hardy of London, and a big pigskin box of tackle. I remembered to have heard John Fulton say that he had none of such things with him in Aiken, and I thought they might come in handy for him at Palm Beach. I cannot quite explain why it was, but I had the sudden desire to load the man with favors and presents.

It was only on the way to his house that the rod and the tackle-box struck me as an excellent excuse for so early a morning call. I left them on the table in the front hall, and marched boldly through the house, and unannounced into the living-room.

Of all the Lucy that turned swiftly from a window at the sound of my steps, and hurried to meet me, I saw only the great blue eyes.

She came into my arms as if it was the most natural thing in the world for her to do, as if they had always been her comfort and her refuge. She was calm and fresh as a rose in the early morning. I could feel her heart beating tranquilly against mine. It seemed to me that the essence of every sweetest flower in the world had been used in her making. I felt that she was the most precious and defenseless thing in creation, and that me alone she trusted to cherish her and to defend her. It could not but be right to hold her thus closer and closer and to learn that her heart beat no longer tranquilly, but with a fluttering throbbing quickness like the heart of a wild bird that you have caught and hold in your hand.

All this while my lips were pressed to hers and hers to mine. Then from the playground door rose in lamentation over some tragic-seeming mishap of play, the voice of Hurry.

Our kiss ended upon the shrill note of woe and protest. But still we looked each other in the eyes, and she said: "What are we going to do about it?"

XXII

SHE hadn't told her husband.

She had been on the point of telling him, but for once her great gift of frankness had failed her. She had not feared any storm that might burst upon her own head; it was only that her heart had rebelled against adding to the weight of care and sorrow which her husband already carried. Let him have what pleasure he could out of the trip to Palm Beach. When he returned she could do her telling.

The fact that she had not told, and was not going to for some time, troubled her. She felt, she said, as if she was lying. She made it very clear that her reticence was for his sake, not for her own.

Personally I rejoiced in the failure of her frankness. Trouble enough was bound to come of our love for each other; at best there would be weary months of waiting for old knots to be untied before there could be any question of tying new ones. There would be at least one dreadful interview to be gone through with John Fulton; many readjustments of

friendships, some friends would side with him, some with her; and last and worst, that moment when I should have to tell my mother and she would grow old before my eyes.

"There'll be heaps of little worries and troubles, Lucy, dear," I said; "bound to be. But we'll not begin to think about them till John comes back from Palm Beach. If it's wrong for us to love each other at all, at least we are going to make it as right as we can. We owe ourselves all the unalloyed happiness we can lay hands on. So—let's pretend."

We sat on the sofa in the Fultons' living-room holding hands, like two children.

"Let's pretend," I said, "that there aren't any complications; that time has gone backward ten years; that we've just gotten engaged; that there's nobody to disapprove and be unhappy about it. I can pretend true, if you can."

"It's easy for me," said Lucy; "I was never any good at remembering or looking forward, never any good at anything that wasn't going on right there and then. Oh, I'm so glad it's *you!*"

"Why, Lucy?"

"Because you're not a bit like me. If you were like me, we wouldn't think of what would happen

later on, we'd just go away together. It's so complicated and foolish to think we can't. Laws and people make such a snarl of things. I wouldn't try to untangle it, I'd just cut it all to pieces, and then I suppose we'd be sorry."

"Yes, dear, we'd be very, very sorry. And the world would make us suffer almost more than our love could make up to us for. So we'll just have to pretend for a while."

"And besides," she said in a startled sort of way, "I might fall out of love with you, mightn't I? Oh, I've fallen out of love lots of times—then with John, and maybe I'll fail you. You must know that I'm not any good. But even if I'm not, I do love you. Oh, I do."

"Do you?"

"And I *trust* you so. There's nobody so kind and thoughtful and strong."

It is pleasant for an unkind, thoughtless weak man to be told such untruths by the woman he loves. And for a few moments I imagined I had the qualities that she had wished upon me, nay, loved upon me. For a few moments there was no kindness, no thoughtfulness, no strength of which I was incapable.

"When your arms are around me I *know* that nothing can hurt me."

I was holding her in my arms now. But there came in through the hall a pattering of little feet, and by the time Jock and Hurry had burst into the room I was at a garden window looking out, and Lucy had caught up from her work bag that Penelope's web of a silk necktie upon which she so often worked, and made no progress.

"Has Favver come back?"

"Why, no, you little goose. He's gone to Palm Beach. We took him to the train. He won't be back tomorrow, nor the day after. Nor the day after that," and she halted only when she had come to about the tenth tomorrow. "And now make your manners to Mr. Mannering."

In fiction children and dogs have an intuitive aversion for the villain of the piece. But Jock and Hurry had none for me. Indeed they liked me very much and looked to me for treats, and rides round the block, and romping games in which I fled and they pursued. But then it was only since yesterday that I had become a genuine villain. Had their intuition made the discovery? I think I was a little anxious.

But they rushed upon me, and we were to remain for the present at least, so it seemed, the same old friends.

It flashed across my mind that some day in the not far future these children would live under my roof; surely the courts would award them to Lucy; and I highly resolved to be a genuine father to them through thick and thin. Somehow or other they must always be fond of me. Whatever I had to leave when I died they must share equally with any children that I might happen to have of my own. Children? I caught Lucy's eyes. We looked at each other across the tops of those children's heads, and read each other's thoughts. I know this, because when Jock and Hurry had been sent away, I said: "Did you know what I was thinking of just then? I was thinking, wondering, hoping——"

"I couldn't love you," she said quietly, "and not want what you want and hope what you hope."

"Lucy!"

I touched her hair with the tips of my fingers.

"What, dear?"

"There was never anyone in the world so wonderful as you, so beautiful, so generous."

"I suppose it's nice to have you think so." She looked with great contentment at the necktie.

"You haven't told me when Schuyler is coming."

"He's coming tomorrow."

"That's fine. But it will have its funny side."

"Why?"

"Well, I shall have to tell him all about us, won't I? And we were schoolmates together, and I think telling him I love his sister and want to marry her and asking his consent has its funny side. *He'll* be on our side anyway, Lucy."

"I'm afraid nobody will think it's as nice as we do."

"Well, of course, it isn't as nice for anybody as it is for us."

"Will you tell him right away?"

"Couldn't I wait a few days? Somehow I like to bask in the sunshine of just *you* knowing and just *me* knowing. What do *you* think?"

She gave me a wonderful look. "I'm not here to think—I'm here to take orders from my dear."

I let five days go before I told Schuyler. They were five wonderful days, during which we borrowed no trouble from the past or the future; five days

during which we agreed to cross our bridges only when we came to them. On that fifth day I received a long letter from Harry Colemain dated Palm Beach.

MY DEAR FELLOW [he wrote]: At the risk of losing you I think that I must tell you something of the experiences that I have been having with John Fulton. To begin with he told me about his wife's failure of affection and their domestic smash-up. He told me going down in the train. We shared the drawing-room. Every time I was jolted into wakefulness, I found him wide awake. For five days I don't think he has slept a wink. He looks parched and dry like a mummy. He has tried very hard to be a cheerful companion, and we have fished and swum and gone through the motions of all the Palm Beach recreations. But his mind is never for one single instant clear of his troubles. We have become very intimate. I think he had to talk or die. He apologizes very often for having talked and continuing to do so, but throws himself upon what he calls my mercifulness. He talks in a circle, always coming back to the questions *why* and *what*. *Why* has it happened? *What* has he done to deserve it? He searches his memory for reasons as you look for bits of gold in a handful of sand. Yes, he was very cross once about some money, but that was years before she stopped loving him. It couldn't be *that,* etc., etc.

Our rooms are separated by a little parlor. I'm a sound sleeper, and hate being disturbed, but I have given him positive orders to wake me if he gets lonely and wants to talk.

He's only obeyed these orders once. And then he didn't exactly obey them, he waked me because he couldn't control his nerves. He couldn't sleep, as usual, so he started to get up, and just when he got his legs over the side of the bed he began to laugh. It was his laughter that waked me. By the time I was wide awake the laughter sounded very ugly, and by the time I got to him it was mixed with awful sobs that came all the way from his diaphragm and seemed as if they were going to tear him to pieces. I turned on the light, but the moment I saw his face I turned it off. It isn't decent for one man to see another have hysterics. We haven't spoken of the thing since, but he knows that I came in and sat by him and felt horribly sorry for him. I can read this in his eye. And I think he would do anything in the world for me. The next morning his voice was very hoarse; sometimes a woman's voice is that way after she's paid somewhat over-handsomely for being a woman. I am trying to convey to you the impression that the man is in a terribly bad way, and through no possible fault of his own, which must make his torment harder to bear.

What I think about Lucy Fulton is simply this: that she ought to be cowhided until she sees which side her bread is buttered on. And this is where you come in. You're great friends with her, and have a lot of influence with her. John says so. She admires what she is pleased to call your judgment. Can't you make her see that just because she has been spoiled, and given all the best of everything, she's gotten bored, and is letting one of the best men in this world eat his heart out with grieving? She ought to lie to him. She ought to telegraph him to come back, and when she gets him back she ought to make him think that she still loves him.

Every woman has at heart one chance to be decent. This is hers.

Another thing. John has betrayed his notion that Lucy sees too much of you for her own good, at this time. He doesn't even imagine that she cares for you in any way that she shouldn't or you for her; but he does wish—well, that you'd gone to California when you planned to, etc., etc. Now the season's pretty nearly over, and I know that a few weeks one way or the other never did matter to you and won't now. Of course, it has its ridiculous side, but I really think it would comfort John Fulton quite a little if he heard that you had left Aiken. You see he's half crazy with grief and insomnia, and he's got it in his head that if Lucy had fewer other people to amuse her, she might get bored again and in sheer boredom turn again to him. But just use your influence with Lucy, if you've got any. I tell you on the honor of a cynical and skeptical man, that if things go on the way they are going, I think John Fulton will die of a broken heart. You see, he's had too much—more than you and I can possibly imagine—and that much he has now lost. If he isn't to get back any portion of it, he'll curl up and die.

Hoping you're having a fine time and fine weather,

Always your affectionate friend,

H. C.

Well, the days of basking in the sunshine on top of the powder magazine were over.

After some thought, I went to Lucy's brother

and gave him Harry's letter to read. He had slept late, and I found him dressing.

Schuyler was, of course, deeply troubled and concerned. That he himself hadn't had "an inkling of this—not an inkling," seemed for some minutes quite important to him, for he made the statement a number of times. Then, for he was energetic, and, like Lucy, oftenest in a hurry, he said:

"The thing to do is for us to take this letter to Lucy, stand over her while she reads it, and then throw hot shot into her. Why it's a damned shame! John's been twice as good a husband as Lucy's been a wife. And now she does this to him." Then something appeared to strike Schuyler's sense of humor, for he burst out laughing. "And he's getting jealous of you!" he said gleefully. "When did you first become a snake in the grass?"

"Perhaps you'll end by calling me that," I said gravely. "Stop laughing, Schuyler. A very sad thing has happened and a very wonderful thing. Lucy and I——"

His face became instantly as grave as mine. "Lucy and you?"

"We hope that you'll be on our side."

"And John doesn't know?"

"You see by Harry's letter that although he doesn't *know,* his intuition is trying to tell him."

"How long's this been goin' on?"

"It just came, Schuyler, happened, was—not many days ago. We didn't see it coming, and——"

He interrupted sharply, his eyes grown suddenly cold. "I want to know if you have still a sort of right to be in this house?"

"Why—yes—I think so."

"*Think*—don't you *know?*"

He gave a harsh short laugh.

"I know what you are driving at, of course. We care about each other. If *that's* wrong, that's all that is wrong."

"You take a weight off me," he said, and his tone was more friendly.

"You always maintained that love was its own justification, Schuyler?"

"And I've heard you maintain that it wasn't. Now we seem to have swapped beliefs."

He turned to his dressing-table and tied his tie. While so doing he muttered: "Pleasant vacation in sunny South."

And then was silent. I could not think of anything to say. Having finished dressing he thrust

his hands into his trousers pockets and began to pace about the disordered room.

"Shall we go out in the sun?" I suggested.

"A dark cave would be more in keepin' with my feelings. Let's stop here a little and talk. What's the idea anyway?"

"Why, the usual idea, I suppose."

"John to give Lucy a divorce, you and Lucy to marry shortly after, and Jock and Hurry to go to hell! I think less than nothing of the usual idea. To begin with, why should John give Lucy a divorce? She's the one that's done all the harm. I *know* I'm her brother. It only helps me to see her character clearer than other people do. Well, say he isn't the fool I think he is. Say he *won't* give her a divorce? What then?"

"Hadn't we better cross that bridge when we come to it?"

"In the usual way, I suppose. No. I'm too old-fashioned to like usual ways of doing things. Furthermore, I like you and Lucy too much. I don't want to see her life ruined, and John after all is a manufacturer of ammunition. How about crossin' the bridge and findin' him on the other side with a big bang-stick in his hand?"

I shrugged my shoulders, though at heart I was not indifferent to the picture which Schuyler had conjured up.

"Oh," said he, "what a damned mess! Come, we'll talk to Lucy."

I went with him most unwillingly. And I thought it good fortune that we did not find her alone, but with Evelyn, Dawson and the children.

Schuyler kissed his sister good morning with warm, brotherly affection and gave her a playful pat or two on the back.

"All we need," he said cheerfully, "is old John, and a girl apiece for Archie and me, to be a happy family party."

He made goat's eyes at Evelyn and Dawson. The latter blushed. But the former returned his glance with a fine and mischievous indifference.

"Now, people," Schuyler continued, "I'm on my vacation. I've plenty of energy, and I'm open to suggestion. You, Evelyn, do you want to ride with me or with Dawson?"

"I want to ride with you, but I'm going to play golf with Dawson."

"When?"

"We were just lingering to say good morning."

She rose a little languidly, and I perceived with misgivings that she and Dawson were really about to depart.

"Well," said Schuyler, "any time you feel like shakin' Dawson, just put me wise, there's a good fellow!"

When Dawson and Evelyn had gone, Schuyler proceeded to get rid of the children. He gave them fifty cents apiece, and said that if he didn't see them or hear them for half an hour they could keep the money.

"Are you trying to get this room all to yourself?" asked Lucy. "Do you want Archie and me to vanish, too?"

"No," said Schuyler; "much as you and Archie may wish to, I want nothing of the kind. Lucy, I think you'd better telegraph John to come home, don't you?"

"I've told Schuyler, Lucy," I said.

"And that's a good thing," said Schuyler; "because I don't have to take sides. I like you all. You and Archie *have* to take your side, and John has to take his, naturally."

Lucy, her hands folded in her lap, looked bored and annoyed.

"A lot of talk isn't going to help any," she said.

"For certain reasons, Lucy," said Schuyler, "you and Archie are just now as blind as two bats. You don't see what you are doing, and you don't see what you are up against."

"I've only one life," said Lucy, "and it's my own."

"But it isn't," said Schuyler; "you gave it to John. I'd be mightily hurt and shocked to find out that you were an Indian giver."

"John will give my life back to me when he knows."

"Well, find out if he will or not. Send for him. Tell him what's happened."

"I think that would be best, Lucy," I said.

"Then, of course, I'll send," she said. "But——"

"John, you know," said Schuyler, "may not take you two very seriously. He may think that Lucy's feelings for you, Archie, are just a passing whim. Upon the grounds of his own experience with Lucy, he would be within his rights to feel that way. Why not," his face brightened into a sort of cheerfulness, "why not test yourselves a little? You go north, Archie, and wait around, and then, after a while, if you and Lucy feel the same, it will be time enough to tell John. It's all been too sudden for you to feel

sure of yourselves. It isn't as if neither of you had ever been in love before and gotten over it. As a matter of cold fact, you've both been tried before now and found wanting. So I think you ought to go slow—for John's sake. He's the fellow that's been tried and that hasn't been found wanting."

It was obvious that Lucy did not like her brother's suggestion at all, for she rose suddenly, her hands clenched, and exclaimed:

"Oh, you don't understand at all. How can I go on living with a man I don't love? How can you ask me to be so false to myself and to Archie——"

"And to Jock and Hurry?" asked Schuyler gently.

She showed no emotion at the mention of these names.

"Don't they count for anything?" persisted Schuyler.

"Of course they count for something, so does poor John. Do you think it's any pleasure to have hurt him so? But is it my fault if they don't count *enough?*"

Here she came swiftly to my side, and slid her hand under my arm and clung to it. "They count," she said, "but they don't count enough." And she

turned to me. "You are all that counts. I'd give up my life for you, and I'd give up my children and everything. You know that."

There was a long silence. Then Schuyler, speaking very slowly, said: "You'd go away with him, and never see Jock and Hurry again, not be able to go to them when they were sick, not to be at little Hurry's wedding when she grows up and gets married. . . . For God's sake!"

"*Now* do you realize that I'm in earnest?" she cried.

Schuyler turned quietly on his heel and left the room. After a while we heard his voice in the distance, mingling joyfully with the voices of Jock and Hurry.

Lucy's face, all tears now, was pressed to my breast.

"You are giving up too much for me, my darling," I said; "I'm not worth it."

"But if you went out of my life I'd die!"

"I won't go out of your life, Lucy. But there are lives and lives. We could meet and be together to gather strength for the times we had to be apart."

At that she had a renewal of crying, and cried for a long time.

" 'You are all that counts . . . you know that.' "

"It isn't right for Jock and Hurry to run any risk of losing you," I said, "and love—Lucy—love with renunciation is a wonderful thing, and a strong thing."

"I'm not strong. I don't want to be strong. I just want to give and give and give."

"We could have our own life apart from everybody else—but not a hidden guilty life—a life to be proud of—a life in which you would strengthen me for my other life and I would strengthen you for yours."

She stopped crying all at once and freed herself from my arms. "Then you don't want me?"

"I want you."

She lifted her hands to my shoulders. "Suppose we find that we can't stand a life of love—with renunciation?"

"At least we would have tried to do what seemed to make for the happiness of the most people."

"And you think I ought to live on with John, as —as his wife?"

"No, I couldn't bear that—but as his friend, Lucy, as the mother of Jock and Hurry. Oh, no," I said; "I couldn't bear it, if—if you weren't faithful to me."

"And you would be faithful to me?"

"In thought and deed."

"And we'd just be wonderful friends?"

"Lovers, too, Lucy. We couldn't help that."

And I kissed her on the forehead. And at that moment I felt very noble, and that the way of life which I had proposed was a very fine way of life, and possible of being lived.

"Then," she said, "John mustn't know. He must never know. It will always be our secret. But then Schuyler knows."

"When I tell him what we mean to do, he won't tell."

And the first chance I had I told Schuyler. And finished with, "So don't tell John, will you?"

"I'll see how happy Lucy manages to make him, first," said Schuyler. "But if you think he won't find out all by himself, you're mistaken. It's a rotten business all around."

And he looked at me with a kind of comical amazement. "Think of Lucy carin' more for you than for Jock and Hurry!" he exclaimed. "I suppose you regale her from time to time with episodes from your past life? . . . Well, if I didn't think you'd both get tired of each other before long, I'd

feel worse. One thing, though, if I promise you that I won't give you away to John, will you promise me for yourself and for Lucy that you won't take any serious step, without telling me first, and giving me a chance to try to dissuade you?"

"As there is to be no question of a serious step," I said, "I promise."

XXIII

OURS was to be one of the most beautiful and beneficial loves of history. Almost we fell in love with our new way of loving. It had, we felt, a dignity and a purpose lacking in other loves. To look each other in the eyes, and feel that in a moment of strength, spurred by pity for those who had no such love as ours to sustain them, we had renounced each other, was a state of serenity and peace.

It added to the beauty of our renunciation that it claimed no luster of publicity, but had been made in quiet privacy. No one, we thought, will ever know; yet it will have been strong and pure, so that the world cannot but be the better for it.

We delighted for a while in our supreme renunciation as children delight in a new toy. And even now I can look back upon that time and wish that there could have been a little more substance to the shadow. It was a time of wonderful and sweet intimacy. We were to tell each other everything. There was delight in that. There was the delight of look-

ing ahead and planning the meetings that should be ours in other places, until at last John himself came to realize that in our loving friendship was nothing unbeautiful, or unbeneficent, and meetings would happen when or where we pleased, the world silenced by the husband's approval.

So I did not take Harry Colemain's well-meant advice, and leave Aiken.

For a while it would suffice John to know that Lucy intended to stand by him and be the keeper of his house; to put his interests first, and to make up to him in dutifulness and economy for the love which she could not but reserve. Yes, indeed! Riding slowly through the spring woods, I made bold to preach a gospel of new life to her, and she listened very meekly, like a blessed angel, and she felt sure that from me she would derive the will and the strength. Mostly it was a gospel of economy that I preached and how best she might help her husband back upon his feet. And before his return from Palm Beach she had made a beginning. She bought a book to keep accounts in, and she got together all the bills she could lay hands on, and added them up to an appalling total (several, for it came different each time) and she stacked the bills in order of their

pressingness, with the requests for payment from lawyers and collectors on top, and she felt an unparalleled glow of virtue and helpfulness.

And one day she took Jock and Hurry in the runabout (Cornelius Twombly behind) and drove to the station to welcome John home. How sweet the sight of those three faces must have seemed to him after absence! Indeed they had seemed very sweet to me as I looked into them just before they drove stationward. I was not to show up for two or three days. That was one compromise on Harry Colemain's advice. It would show John that Lucy and I were not entirely engrossed in each other's society. It would give him time to turn around and see how he liked the fact that Lucy was going to stick to him, and in many ways be a better wife to him. It would give me an opportunity to see, and be seen by many people. It would, in short, be a beginning of knocking on the head and silencing most of the talk that there had been about Lucy and me.

When you have a secret you might as well do your best to keep it.

So I did not see John Fulton for three days after his return from Palm Beach, and then by accident.

He had stopped at my father's house to leave the rod and tackle-box which I had loaned him, and I, happening to be in the hall, opened the door myself, and went out to speak with him.

"Have a good time?" I asked.

The man looked so sick that I pitied him.

"Mechanically, yes. I went through the motions," he said. "That's a beautiful rod. It was the most useful thing I had along. Going to the club? I'll drive you."

"Will you? Thanks. I'll just put these things in the hall."

We drove slowly toward the club.

"Glad to be back?"

"Very. I couldn't have stayed away from Lucy and the kids much longer, even if I'd been held."

He laughed gently.

"Lucy," he said, "must have thought that I wasn't ever coming back. She's been trying to put the house in order."

"How do you mean?"

"Oh, finding out how much money's owed, and making a beginning of tying up loose ends."

"Kids all right? I haven't set eyes on 'em for three or four days."

"Yes, the kids are fine," and he added, after a pause, "and Lucy's fine too."

There were several men in the club and they made John heartily welcome, and told him how much better he looked than when he went away. As a matter of fact he looked much worse.

We all had tea together and asked questions about Palm Beach, and if he had seen so and so, and if he'd brought any money away from the gambling place, and what was new, and amusing, etc.

"Do you know," he said all of a sudden, "there was one very interesting thing that happened. Anybody mind if I talk shop?"

Nobody did; so he went on: "I had a telegram from a Baron Schroeder asking if it would be convenient for me to see him. He came all the way down to Palm Beach, talked to me all the time between trains, and flew away north again. He wanted to know how many rifle cartridges I could make in a year, at a price, a very round price, how many in five years. He wanted to know if I could convert any of my plant into a manufactory for shrapnel, and so on. What interested me is that he should take all that trouble over a small concern like mine. It looks as if someone saw a time when there would

be a great dearth of ammunition. Two days ago Schroeder had gone away. I was braced, while in swimming, by a Russian gentleman. He apologized and plied me with the same sort of questions; I gave him the same sort of offhand answers that I had given Schroeder, and then I asked him what it was all about, and I told him about Schroeder without mentioning names. He said he could only guess, but that if I would sign a contract he would keep my plant running full for five years. It looks, doesn't it, as if somebody had decided to change the map of Europe, and as if others suspected the design?"

"Well, what came of it? Did you land a contract? Tell more."

"Nothing has come of it yet. But I think something will. I'm to meet the Russian in New York shortly."

"Why the Russian? The Baron saw you first."

"The Russian had better manners," said Fulton simply. "I think he liked me, and I know I liked him!"

Fulton asked me to dinner, but I refused, and so it was nearly four days before I saw Lucy again. In the meanwhile Harry Colemain told me more about the Palm Beach trip. The ammunition in-

quirie nad, it seemed, strengthened Fulton's nerves; there had been no repetition of the hysterics.

"A man," Harry said, "must be even more down and out than Fulton not to be braced by a prospect of good business. From what he told me, if the contract goes through, he stands to make a fortune."

"Is there anything peculiarly good about the Fulton cartridges, or is Europe just out to gather up all the ammunition she can?"

"It looks rather like a sudden general demand. But of course nobody *knows* anything except the insiders. Fulton says if the contract goes through he can die any time and be sure that his family will be well provided for. That feeling will stiffen his backbone. But you haven't told me if you said anything to Lucy?"

I had been dreading that question as one which could not be answered with complete frankness. I don't enjoy lying. Not that my moral sense revolts, but because I am lazy. Lying calls for deliberate efforts of invention.

"In a general way, yes," I evaded. "But her own good sense has come to the rescue. John's absence gave her a chance to see how she really felt about things. She won't leave him. Indeed, she'll try to

make up to him in every way she can for her failure of affection."

"If she does *that,*" said Harry, "I daresay the affection will come back. The more you benefit a person the more you like that person. The more you fail in your duty to a person, the less you like that person. I'm delighted with what you say. With all her charm and beauty she can make him happy if she tries."

"I think it's not a question of charm and beauty," I said. "It's a question of keeping house for him, and being a good mother to the children, and being loyal to him and them."

"There are reservations?"

"She doesn't love him."

"Oh," said Harry scornfully, "*that* sort of thing won't work."

"We know a good many cases where that sort of thing seems to work."

"It only works when the husband acts like a natural man. Fulton won't. For him only Lucy is possible. There can be no substitute. No. In this case it won't work. He's too young and she's too good-looking."

"Then it won't work," I said shortly.

"She makes me sick," said Harry. "She gets her board and lodging and her clothes and spending money from him, and love and protection, and—Oh, it isn't as if there'd never been anything between them. After all, as far as he's concerned, she's no novice."

"The moment she stopped loving him she became spiritually separated from him."

"Spiritually be damned!" exclaimed Harry. "Don't talk to me. There are women in New York who to keep from starvation, will make love to any man that comes along, for a pittance. They do the very best they can to earn the money. I can't help admiring 'em. But your fashionable married woman, she's too refined, too delicately souled, too spiritual to do anything but eat herself sick on her man's money and spend him into a hole. It's bad enough to be a prostitute who plays the game, but it's a damned sight worse to be a prostitute who doesn't."

"I'm not going to get angry with you, Harry. We've been through too much together. But I think you have said enough. Lucy is one of the finest, purest-minded women in the world."

"Then she ought to be her husband's wife, or get

out. If she's not his wife, she's no business grafting on him for board and lodging and pocket money. How long does a pure-minded, good-looking woman keep off the streets if she can't raise the wind any other way? Not long. And how many men can she graft on? Plenty of 'em—once. But not twice. The word goes round about her. 'She's a beauty to look at,' says the word, 'but she doesn't earn her money.' "

"Many marriages," I said, "*have* to be rearranged and compromised."

"Don't say *have* to be, say *are*."

"Harry," I said with great firmness, "the country needs rain like the devil."

After a moment, good humor returned to his face. He said: "You've just won an argument. I also am dry as a bone."

XXIV

"THIS isn't the last ride together," said Lucy, "but almost. This time we are really going."

We had turned into Lovers' Lane, outward-bound, the ponies walking.

"John will have to be in New York for many days about this Russian contract, and he doesn't want to take the long trip back. So we're all going together."

"I shan't stay here very long after you've gone."

"No, you mustn't."

"We'll have lots of nice parties in New York."

"John says he's going to sell our house here, or rent it, or get rid of it somehow."

"Why?"

"Because he's been so unhappy in it. He says unless his whole mind is made over we'll never come to Aiken again."

She drew a long breath, and her eyes roved among the great pine trees on either side of the road as if

she wished to impress them forever upon her memory.

"I love it all so much," she said simply.

"I'm so sorry," I said; "and it means that I won't ever be coming back for more than a minute. And I love it, too."

"We're to spend the summer in Stamford to be near the works. *Stamford!*"

"You'll find lots of people to like, and bully sailing and swimming."

"And bully spells of white-hot, damp weather, and bully big mosquitoes."

"It ought to be cheap."

"Very cheap."

Then we both laughed. Then we were silent.

"Tell me," I said, "how is the great compromise working?"

"I don't know. I told him how I'd made up my mind to stick by the ship, so that there wouldn't be any scandal, or anything to break up his home, or hurt the children, and how I was going to be better about money, and he said, 'Very well, Lucy, we'll try it for a while, but I don't think compromises are much good.' He wants me to do all I'm trying to do, and be his wife too. I thought he'd—Oh, I

thought he'd be pleased and grateful—instead of that he tries to be cold to me, and is very sharp and stern."

"It takes time to settle down to any new modus vivendi."

"Well," she cried, "I'm not doing it because I want to, am I? I'm only doing it for his sake. I'm doing every blessed thing I *can* to save the situation; and if there are things I simply *can't* do—why he ought to be generous and understand. Oh, I know it isn't going to work! And all the time when he isn't being cold and stern, he—he's trying to make me love him again, and come back to him. And right in the middle of that he'll fly into a rage, and say that I ought to be *compelled* to behave like a rational human being."

"But he wouldn't compel you to do anything you didn't want to do, Lucy. Trust him for that."

"I don't know. He's so different from the way he used to be. Sometimes I'm afraid. Sometimes I am afraid to be alone in the same house with him. If I didn't have you to back me up, and give me strength I'd—but it can't last long. I know it can't. And I don't know that it's worth trying."

"You are still fond of him, Lucy?"

"And sorry for him, Oh, so sorry. But fondness and sorrow aren't everything."

"It will be better when he has the new contract to occupy him, and keep him away. It won't be an all-day affair then. And all the time you and I'll be meeting to talk things over, and borrow strength to go on with. It isn't easy for me either, dear. And of course, if after trial we find it won't work, why then it will be our duty to ourselves to cut the Gordian knot."

She turned toward me and we looked into each other's eyes for a long time.

"I've given him all I can," she said. "It isn't enough. It never will be enough. Oh, if there are knots to be cut, let's cut 'em and have done with it."

I dropped my reins, and leaning wide, took her in my arms and kissed her many times.

"We are romantic children," I said, "to think that there could be any other way. God bless you, my darling, we'll cut all the knots, and begin life all over again, and always be together."

She became then wonderfully cheerful and excited, and riding always at a walk, no longer on roads, but through the deep woods, we made our plans for the future.

Nothing was to be said to John until we were in a bigger place than Aiken. The bigger the place the smaller the scandal. I offered (with grave misgivings) to do the telling; but Lucy would not have it so. "It's his right," she said, "to know from me." John having been told, would, we felt sure from what we knew of his character, be willing to do the right thing. It wasn't as if he had been dishonored in any way. He would even be grateful to us for having been strong-minded and aboveboard. It would hurt him terribly. Yes, but a sudden final hurt was better than the lingering sickness from which he was now suffering. There would, of course, be no question of alimony. My father, much as he might disapprove of the whole affair, was not only fond of me, but fond of Lucy, and he would see us through.

It would take a long while to get a divorce. That was the darkest cloud on the horizon. But we must face that cheerfully; our reward would be all the greater when it came.

That John would be unwilling to give up Lucy even when he knew that she loved someone else never occurred to us. He belonged to that class of men whose code is to give the women all the best of everything. He was too fond of Lucy to wish to see

her hurt. And if he wouldn't give her a divorce, hurt she would be, for in that unlikely event we were determined to jump on the nearest steamer and sail away for parts unknown.

"Why not come in?" said Lucy, when we had finished our ride. "You haven't been near the house for days, so it won't be very noticeable."

"All right," I said, "for a minute."

It was between dusk and dark. The lights had not been turned on in the hall. The opportunity seemed rare and sweet. We stood for one brief fleeting moment closely enlaced—and swiftly separated, and stood breathing fast, and listening.

Lucy was the first to make up her mind.

She stepped swiftly to the dining-room door and flung it open. She was in time to see the trim shoulders and white cap of a servant disappearing from the dining-room into the pantry.

"Who was it?"

"My new waitress."

"Hilda?"

Lucy smiled grimly. "She'll leave tomorrow."

"Don't discharge her. She might tell. Perhaps she didn't see."

I joined Lucy in the dining-room, closed the door,

knelt and looked back into the hall through the keyhole.

"Could she see?"

I rose to my feet and nodded.

"He mustn't hear from anyone but me," said Lucy. "I'll speak to her."

But Hilda was not in the pantry.

"I don't think she'll tell," I said, "and after all what does it matter? Let's take a chance."

Mentally I resolved to communicate with Hilda at the earliest possible moment, and to use whatever influence I had upon her. So I was no sooner in my room at home than I took the receiver from my private telephone and gave the number of the Fultons' house. After an interval I heard Hilda's voice.

"It's Mr. Mannering, Hilda."

"Yes, sir."

"I want to see you about something important."

"I know."

So she knew, did she?

"Can you meet me at ten o'clock tonight?"

"Where?"

"Leave the house at ten sharp, and walk toward the town; I'll be watching for you. You'll come?"

"Yes, sir."

XXV

NEAR the Fultons, fronting on the street, is a large overgrown yard that has never been built on. Here in the shadow of a great cedar tree I waited and watched for Hilda. On the stroke of ten I saw her coming. She had a neat, brave, brisk way of walking, her head well up, as if she was afraid of nothing. A few moments later I hailed her from under my cedar, and after glancing up and down the street to see if anyone was watching, she joined me there.

It was very dark. I could just make out her face. She was breathing fast and had one hand pressed upon her heart.

"Thank you for coming, Hilda. You saw Mrs. Fulton and me in the hall?"

"And heard you."

"I'm throwing myself on your mercy, Hilda. Mrs. Fulton and I love each other. When we get back to New York we are going to tell Mr. Fulton. He will let Mrs. Fulton divorce him, and then we are to be married. You'll be my friend, won't you,

and not tell? There's been nothing wrong, Hilda——"

"Only kisses."

"But if he found out from anyone but Mrs. Fulton—you see he isn't very well and he might do something crazy—something tragic. You see if you told him what you'd seen, he might act before anyone had a chance to explain."

I was trying to make the matter sound more serious than I felt it to be. Whatever happened, I did not think that Fulton was the kind of man who forgets his education and his civilization, but I wanted, if I could, to frighten Hilda into secrecy.

"You'd not want to get me all shot up, would you, Hilda?"

She was silent for a time, as if weighing pros and cons in her head. Then she looked up at me and said:

"When *I* saw, *I* didn't do anything crazy."

"Hilda," I said, "he has to be hurt and you have to be hurt. That's always been the way with love—it always will be."

She was silent again. Then she said in a low voice that carried with it a certain power to thrill: "He'd die for her. And I'd die for you. But he's only a

worn-out glove, and I'm only a common servant. She thinks she'd die for you, and you think you'd die for her. But you're both wrong. A woman that won't stand by her babies isn't going to die for anyone, not if she knows it. A man that gets to your age without marrying any of the women he's gone with isn't going to die for anyone if he can help it. Wait till you've crossed her selfish will a few times and see how much she'll die for you; wait till she begins to use you the way she used him. A whole lot you'll want to die for—her—then——"

"I can't listen to this, Hilda."

"You *will* listen, or else I'll scream and say you attacked me—a whole lot she'll feel like dying for you *then*. Servants have eyes and ears and hearts. There's servants in that house that know how things used to be, who see how things are now, since you came philandering around. And do you know what those servants think of her, and what I think of her for the way she's treated him? Oh, they like her well enough because she's gentle and easy-going, and good-tempered and easy to get on with; but there isn't a servant in that house would change characters with her. We think she's the kind of woman that's beneath contempt—lazy, sel-

fish, spendthrift—always pampering number one—and going about the world looking like a sad, bruised lily. Do you think the servants in that house don't know all about *your* goings and comings, and the life you've led, the harm you've done and didn't have to do, the good you might have done, and didn't?"

"But, Hilda——"

She motioned me to be silent. Her ears, sharper than mine, or more attentive, had heard voices. They were negro voices, a man's and a woman's. We drew deeper into the shadow of the cedar.

"So you got no mo' use for me, nigger?" The man's voice rumbled softly and threatened like distant thunder. "Yo' got to have yo' fling?"

Then the woman's voice, shrill but subdued: "I don' love you no mo', Frank."

"You got er nice home 'n nice lil' babies, 'n you goin' to leave 'em fo' a yaller man—is you?"

They were opposite us now, walking very slowly and occasionally lurching against each other.

"Yo' ain't goin' ter make trouble, Frank?"

"I ain't goin' ter give you up, Lily."

"You ain't? How you goin' ter fix fo' ter keep me?"

They came to a halt and faced each other, the woman defensive and defiant, the man somber, quiet, with a certain savage dignity and slowly smoldering like an inactive volcano. You couldn't see their features, only a white flashing of eyes and teeth in such light as there was.

"You's one er dese new women," said the man softly. "You's got ter be boss 'n have yo' own way."

He stood for some moments looking down into her face, appraising as it were her flightiness, and meditating justice. Then he struck her quietly, swiftly and hard, so that her half-open mouth closed with a sharp snap.

She was not senseless, but she made no effort to rise. He stood over her, smoldering. Then, his voice suddenly soft and tender, "I reckon I is got ter learn you," he said, and he picked her up in his arms and carried her from the roadside deep into the tangled growths of the vacant yard—deeper and deeper, until no sound at all came to us from them.

"That was Mrs. Fulton's laundress and her husband," said Hilda. "She's been trying to copy Mrs. Fulton; but *he's* settled that. He's a real man, and

he'll keep his wife. Women like to be hit and trampled. It proves to them that they're worth while."

"That may be, Hilda. I don't know. I couldn't hit a woman. . . . You haven't told me that you're not going to tell what you saw."

"I don't know," she said; "he's suffered enough. It ought to end."

"But I thought you—didn't want to hurt me?"

"I don't. Still——"

"Still what?"

"Oh, favors aren't everything."

"What do you mean, Hilda!"

"Oh, I'm just a servant. I suppose I could be bought."

"I thought better of you."

"Not with money."

"Not with money? How then?"

She turned her face up to mine, then smiled and closed her eyes. "A kiss more or less," she said, "wouldn't matter much to *you*."

And I kissed her.

Then she opened her eyes and looked up at me until the silence between us grew oppressive. Then with a sudden, "Oh, what's the use!" turned and hurried off. But I caught up with her in two bounds.

"Don't go away like that."

"Oh," she cried, "I hoped you *wouldn't*. But you *did*. It's bad enough to love you, but to despise you too! Oh, don't worry. *I* won't tell. I've been bought, I've *lived*."

I remained for a long time, alone, under the cedar tree. I was horribly ashamed and troubled, not because I had kissed her, but because I had had the impulse to kiss her again, because I realized at last that it takes more than a romantic love affair to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. Because for a moment I saw myself as Hilda saw me—because for a moment I was able to judge Lucy and me, as others would judge us.

I remained for a long time. The negro and his wife came quietly out of the bushes, her arm through his. She would not now run off with the yellow man. I watched them until the darkness swallowed them.

I leaned against the fragrant stem of the cedar, my hand across my eyes. And in that moment of self-reproach, dread and contempt of the future, I too wished the most worthy and sincere wish of my life.

I wished that I had never been born.

XXVI

FOR once, with complete fervor, I wished that I had never been born. And if I was to get back any glimmerings of self-respect, I must act like a man. Upon what grounds did I found the hope that Fulton would not soon find out about Lucy and me? Why, on the grounds of moral cowardice, of course. I dreaded to face any drastic, final issue. There was no other reason. Well, if I was to prove to myself that I was not a moral coward, Fulton must be told and the issue faced, and Fulton himself must be out-faced. It was not enough to love and be loved in secret. That way lies stealing and cheating. We must come into the open hand in hand, proclaim our love and demand our rights. If these were denied us—well, it would be too bad. But at least we would have come out from under the rose, and the consequences could be flung openly and courageously in the faces of those who denied us. And it would be fairer to Fulton to tell him. He was suffering torment. With a definite cause to face, it would be easier for him to regain his health and his sanity.

Strong in these resolutions, I felt as if a great weight had been lifted from my shoulders. But if you think that I went at once to Fulton and told him, you have greatly misapprehended the mental workings of a butterfly.

I went first to Lucy, and told her that I was going to tell. And from her, too, it was as if a weight had been lifted.

"We can't go on this way forever," I said; "we thought we could, but we know we can't. We love each other and we're human, and sooner or later—Oh, it's best to go to him now with a clean bill, and tell him that love is too strong for us all, and that he must come out on the side of love no matter how much it hurts him."

"When are you going to tell him?"

"No time like the present, Lucy."

And I drew a long breath, for in spite of the bold words, I felt panicky. I felt as if the doctors had just set the time for the operation, and that it was sooner than I expected.

"We ought to have told him long ago. Where is he?"

"In the garden."

"It's a hard thing to do. Give me a kiss."

A moment later I felt strong enough and noble enough to slay dragons. And I found Fulton sitting on a garden bench in a recess of clipped privet, Hurry on his lap.

"She isn't feeling very well, poor baby," he said; "it's the sudden heat. She couldn't eat any breakfast. Did you want to see me about something special?"

"Why, yes, I do. But you're busy with Hurry."

"We were just going in to lie down, weren't we?" he said to the child. "I won't be a minute."

He picked her up in his arms, and carried her into the house. A few moments later he returned, smiling, as if she had said something that had touched his humor.

"Let's sit on the bench," he said. "It's the one cool place in Aiken, this morning."

Mechanically I sat down beside him and accepted a cigarette from his case.

"I always dread the first hot spell for the babies," he said. "I'm glad we're going up early this year."

"You'll be in New York a while?"

"At the New Turner. And then Stamford. Poor Lucy dreads Stamford, but I've got to be near

the works. What are you planning to do this summer?"

"It depends a great deal on you, John."

Now he turned to me with a very grave expression on his face. "On me?"

"I love Lucy, John, and she feels the same way about me."

His expression of courteous inquiring gravity did not change. "So *that*'s what was at the bottom of everything. I told her she was seeing too much of you, but she wouldn't listen. Of course, my contention was just on general principles. I thought you were both to be trusted."

"We only found it out just before you went to Palm Beach."

"You ought to have seen it coming. A man of your experience and record isn't like a college freshman in such matters."

"If I had seen it coming, John, believe me I'd have run from it. But all at once it had come, and it's a question now, not of what might have been, but of Lucy's happiness."

"Yes," he said, "we mustn't think of ourselves now, or of the children. ' We must think of what is best for Lucy. And what is best for Lucy can't be

thought out offhand. There's the complication of winding up here, moving, and so forth. What is your idea? Yours and Lucy's?"

"We hope and trust that you won't want to stand in our way."

"Divorce? Well, of course, it might come to that. It's not, however, an idea which I am prepared offhand to receive with enthusiasm. Any more than I propose to act upon the very first impulse which I had when you told me."

"What was that?"

"I thought how delicious it would be to get my automatic and fill you full of lead. But you and Lucy, I take it, have so far resisted your temptations, and I must battle with mine."

"I ought to have said *that;* our temptations have been resisted, John."

He shrugged that vital fact aside with, "Oh, I should have known if there had been anything to know."

"I needn't say, need I, that I feel like hell about your position, your end of it?"

"My position is not so bad as it was. I have something definite to face now. But much as I appreciate your impulsive good will, I don't think

that your sympathy is a thing which I care to accept. Lucy, of course, feels that her fancy for you is a more imperative call than her duty to her children and me."

"You've been in love, John."

"I *am* in love. I think we had better not discuss our several powers of loving."

He rose from the bench and began to stroll up and down in front of it.

"I haven't," he said, "given this contingency any thought whatever. You and Lucy will have to possess your souls in patience for a time. It is all very sudden. But supposing for a moment that I should consent to a divorce. Are you able to support a wife?"

"I have no money of my own," I said, "but my father, as you know, has oceans of it, and gives me a very handsome income."

"And yet he might not care to support you above the ruins of a home. In that eventuality what could you do? Lucy is very extravagant."

"I could work my hands to the bone for her."

Fulton looked curiously at his own lean, nervous hands, smiled faintly, and said: "Yes, and then be chucked aside like a worn-out garment. Well, we'll

cross that bridge when we come to it. And now you'll be anxious to see Lucy, and report. Tell her that I swallowed the pill without making too much of a face. Tell her that I seemed inclined to be reasonable. Tell her also with my compliments that she must continue to exercise self-restraint and patience. Things are bad enough. If they were any worse I could not answer the consequences."

"All right, John. Thank you for taking it so calmly."

"Oh, I'm not calm inside. Don't worry about that."

I left him there—standing very straight in the garden path, his face the color of granite, and of the stillness.

XXVII

"WHAT did he say?"

Her face was brilliant with excitement and anxiety. And I told her as well as I could.

"He was preternaturally calm and easy," I said; "I couldn't imagine a man being more well-bred about anything. But he won't say anything definite now. Of course, he ought to have time to think. We could have counted on that, if we'd thought. He will take plenty of time to make up his mind, and then he won't change it. But Lord, I'm glad he knows now; and from us."

There was a quiet knocking on the half-open door of the living-room.

"Come in. . . . Oh, John, you needn't have knocked."

He came in slowly and quietly, a gentle smile on his lips. The gray granite look had softened into his natural coloring.

"I must say you're a very handsome pair," he said. "Don't go just yet, Archie. If we three are

to talk things over in the future, we had better have a little tentative practice. Are we three the only ones who know of this sensational development?"

"And Schuyler," I said.

"Is he for you or against you?"

"We thought we could be just great friends and see each other once in a while. He was for that. But, of course, that was only romantic nonsense."

"Yes, that was nonsense," said Fulton. "It would have made my position altogether too ridiculous. Did it occur to you to be great friends, and not see each other?"

"John," exclaimed Lucy, "you don't understand."

"I don't understand the importance which lovers attach to love? Well, perhaps not. Drunkards hate to cure themselves of drink; smokers of smoke; lovers of love. Yet all these appetites can be cured, often to the immense benefit of the sufferers and of everybody concerned. And so you thought you could lead two lives at once, Lucy?"

"I did think so."

"Gathering strength in romantic byways to see you through the prosy thoroughfares? It wouldn't have worked."

"We know that now."

"You couldn't have lied about every meeting with Archie—lied as to where you were going and where you had been. Truth comes natural to you, even if you seem to have fallen down on some of the other virtues."

I *knew* that he was laboring under a great strain. And yet for the life of me I could not read any symptoms of that laboring in his face or voice. His voice was easy, casual, and tinged with humor. It was almost as if he was relieved to find two such inconsequential persons as Lucy and myself at the bottom of his troubles. Now and then his left eyebrow arched high on his forehead, and there would be a sharp sudden glance in the corresponding eye.

"I wonder," he said, turning to me, "if people in your situation ever look at it from the critical outsider's point of view. Have you considered that a passion for something forbidden is not a natural, not a respectable passion? According to all moral and social laws Lucy is a forbidden object for your love and vice versa. People are not going to think well of you two."

"Oh, we know *that*," said Lucy, wearily.

"My dear Lucy, you mustn't show signs of distress so early in the game. What we are discussing,

or trying to throw a little light on, is the subject which just now, by all accounts, should interest you more than anything else in the world. Furthermore, I really must insist on consideration for myself and the children."

"No amount of talk ever made me do right—or wrong," said Lucy; "I just do right or wrong, and of course *you* think this is wrong. So what's the use?"

"Think it wrong," exclaimed Fulton, "of course I do. Don't *you?*" His voice expressed almost horrified surprise. "Don't *you* think it wrong to fall out of love with your husband, into love with another man, and to take no more interest in your children than if they were a couple of wooden dolls made in Germany?"

"Caring *enough* makes everything right," she said, still wearily, as if the whole subject bored her.

"Caring *enough!*" exclaimed John. "Oh, caring *enough* makes everything right. But do you care *enough*—either of you? I may change my mind, but just now, as a man fighting for what little happiness there may be left for him in the world, this question of how much you care is the crux of the whole matter. If I thought that you cared *enough*

I'd take my hat off to the exception which proves the rule that all illicit passions are wrong. If I thought that you cared *enough* I'd think that a great wonder had come to pass in the world, and I'd give you my blessing and tell you to go your ways."

Lucy rose and went appealingly to him. "John, dear," she said, "we *do* care enough."

He turned to me quickly.

"And you think that?"

"I care enough," I said, "so that nothing else matters—not even the hurt to you."

"Do you care so much that no argument will change you?"

I think Lucy and I must both have smiled at him.

"No pressure of opposition?"

"Caring is supposed to thrive on opposition, isn't it?" said I.

"In short," said John, "if I refuse to be divorced you care enough to run away together into social ostracism?"

Lucy smiled at me and I smiled back at her. And at that Fulton's calmness left him for a moment.

"My God," he cried, "I am up against it."

But almost instantly he had himself once more

in hand, and was speaking again in level, almost cheerful tones.

"Social ostracism," he said, "would be very horrid if you stopped caring for each other."

"Why take it for granted that we'd stop caring?"

"I don't. I'm taking nothing for granted. But no girl, Archie, ever cared for a man more than Lucy cared for me—and then she stopped caring. I know less about your stamina. But this is not the first time you've cared."

"It's the first time I've *really* cared," I said.

"It's not the first time you've *said* that you really cared, is it?"

I was unable to answer, and his eyes twinkled with a kind of automatic amusement. Then once more grave, "I never even *thought*," he said, "that I ever cared about anyone but Lucy. That gives me a peculiar advantage in passing judgment on matters of caring—an advantage enjoyed neither by you nor Lucy. I wasn't any more her first flame than she is yours. But she was my first and only flame. I can speak with a troop of faithful years at my back. But you and she have only been faithful to each other for a matter of days. I am not doubting the intensity of your inclination, but I can't help ask-

ing, Will it last? Are you prepared to swear that you will love her and no other all your days?"

"Yes," I said firmly. And I loved her so much at that moment that I felt purified in so saying and believing.

"How about you, Lucy? Never mind, don't answer. You are thinking of that day when you stood up before all our friends and swore that you would love me all your days. Naturally it would embarrass you to repeat that with respect to another, before my face. So I won't ask you to . . ."

"John," said Lucy, "all this is *so* obvious. And it leads nowhere. Talk won't change us. So won't you please say what you are going to do?"

"Not until I know myself," he said. "But there is one thing . . . I think it would be better all round if you saw less of each other until something is decided. I realize that Jock and Hurry and I are very much in the way. Jock and Hurry naturally don't care how much you two are together. But I do. It isn't that I don't trust you out of my sight. You know that. But the mind of a jealous man is a gallery hung with intolerable pictures. Merely to think of Lucy, Archie, giving you the same look that she used to have for me is to burn in hell-fire."

He turned on his heel, and left us abruptly. We could hear him calling to the nurse to ask how Hurry was feeling, and we could hear his steps going up the stair to the nursery.

"He's going to do the right thing, Lucy," I said.

"I wish he wouldn't talk and talk. The milk's spilled. I suppose we've *got* to keep more or less apart."

"Yes, Lucy."

I held out my arms, and for a moment we made, I suppose, one of those intolerable pictures that hung in Fulton's mental gallery. And then I went away.

It was good to have told. I was very deeply in love; I thought that Lucy's and my future could soon be smoothed into shape, but I did not feel happy. I felt as if I had been through a great ordeal of some sort, and had come off second best. It seemed to me that I ought to have stood up more loudly for my love, for its intensity and power to endure.

In addition there had been about John Fulton an ominous quiet. I could better have endured a violent outbreak. For there is no action without its reaction. After a storm there is calm. But Ful-

ton's calm was more like that which precedes a storm.

His breakdown came after I had left. Lucy told me about it. He had come back to her in the living-room, and said things about me that she would never never forgive.

"I don't care what he says about me," she cried, "but if he talks to me against you, I won't stand it."

"It's natural for him to feel bitter against me. I'm sorry, of course. But it doesn't matter."

"If he's got to feel bitter, let him feel bitter against me. If anyone is to blame, I am to blame."

"What did he say about me?" I asked.

"He said you were the kind of man that men didn't count when they were counting up the number of men they knew. He said you had always been too idle to keep out of mischief. And that no pretty woman would be safe from you—if you weren't afraid . . . Afraid!"

"That's quite an indictment."

"I said: 'Why didn't you say all that to his face, when he was here, instead of waiting till you could say it behind his back . . .' "

Here she turned to me with the most wonderful look of tenderness and trust.

"But I know what I know. And you are the kindest and the truest and the gentlest man . . ."

"Oh, I'm not! I'm not, Lucy! . . . But what does that matter, if I never let you find out the difference? . . . We mustn't take what John says too seriously. He's had enough trouble to warp his mind."

She still looked up into my face with that wonderful trust and tenderness. "And you are the most generous man to another man!" she said.

XXVIII

THE very next day Evelyn told a few old friends that she was going to be married to Dawson Cooper. At once Lucy felt that she must give a dinner in the happy young people's honor, and to this dinner, as one of Evelyn's oldest friends and of Dawson's for that matter, I had to be asked.

In many ways, this dinner differed in my memory from other dinners. To begin with, it was exceedingly short, and well done. The table was decorated with that flower which some people call Johnny jump-up, and some heartsease, and of which all that I can state positively is that it is the great-grandmother of the pansy family. We had some tag-ends of Moet and Chandon '84 to drink and a bottle of the old Chartreuse. In the second place, it was the last time I was ever to sit at meat under John Fulton's roof. The dinner had psychological peculiarities. I was in love with my hostess; she with me. Twice I could have run away with the girl in honor of whose engagement the dinner was

being given. My host, who personally had insisted on my presence, would have been delighted to hear of my sudden death. The waitress would have died for me (I had her word for it), and at the same time she despised me. Within the week I had thrown myself on her mercy, and bought her silence with a kiss.

What a dinner it would have been if we had elected to play truth; if each person present could have been forced to say what he or she knew about the others!

Personally I must have rushed out of the house, my fingers in my ears, like Pilgrim.

But we didn't talk about embarrassing things. We made a lot of noise, and did a lot of laughing, and toasting. But I was glad when it was all over. I was always catching someone's eye, and thinking how much harm a man can do, if with no will to do harm, he follows the lines of least resistance and drifts. The harm that is done of malice and purpose has at least a strength of conviction about it, and disregard of consequences. It is far more respectable to do murder in cold blood, than to slaughter a friend because you happen to be careless with firearms.

Among other things that dinner proved to me that it is possible to do several things at once: to laugh, talk, and think. I kept laughing and talking and helping now and then to tease Evelyn and Dawson, and yet all the while I was busy thinking of other things. And all the thinking was based on one wish; not that I had never been born, but that I had my whole life to live over again. Surely, I thought, with another trial I might have amounted to something. I had money back of me, I thought, and position, and a mind—well, not much of a mind, but when you think what that Italian woman does with half-wit children—surely the right educators could have made something quite showy out of me. The energy I had put into acquiring skill at games and in learning the short cuts to pleasure, might have been expended on righteousness and the development of character. Most at ease with the great, I might, during the dearth of great men, have aspired to be an ambassador. I'd have married young, and have given all the tenderness which various women have roused in me, to one woman. And there would have been children, and stability, and a home constantly invaded by proud and happy grandparents. Or if these fine things had not been

in my reach, at least I might have shaken the dust of futile places from my feet, and closed my ears to the voices of futile people. Often I have had the valorous adventurous impulse, and the curiosity to find out what was "beyond the ranges"—merely to resist it. I am Tomlinson, I thought. I might have been Childe Roland.

Was there not still time to turn a new leaf—to be somebody, to accomplish something? Yes, *I* could make the woman who awaited me beyond the puddle of scandal—happy. I could—I must be unselfish and fine where she was concerned. The world might forgive me, it would never quite forgive her. The world would never believe that we had played the game as fairly as it can be played. There would be such talk as, "Of course the moment Fulton found out what was going on, he got rid of her." Other people would say, "Well, damaged goods is all he ever deserved, anyway."

Lucy, damaged goods? I stole a look at her. Little and lovely and happy and full of laughter at the head of her table, there was no shadow upon that pansy face. She was, as always, living in the moment. From all our troubles and complications,

"a rose high up against the thunder were not so white and far away." Remorse would never greatly torment her. In time, too, Fulton's hungry stone-gray face of the last weeks would fade from my memory.

XXIX

BEYOND saying that he thought for various reasons we should see less of each other, Fulton had made no effort to keep Lucy and me apart. If he had an adviser in this, that adviser was Schuyler. The idea, I suppose, was that Lucy, unopposed, would soon tire of the affair, as she had tired of others in her extreme youth, and return to her duty, if not to her affection. But we only loved each other the more. And the various exasperations of delay became hard to bear. Lucy, when what seemed to her a reasonable time had passed, and Fulton had not yet made up his mind about the divorce, was against delay. We had warned Fulton we had played the game, why should we lose time to do so? I had to argue with her against the next steamer for foreign parts, and to persuade her (half persuade her) that in the long run patience would serve us best. "Now," I said, "we don't feel that we need anyone but ourselves. But we both love people—our own kind of people. If John won't play fair (we called it that) our own

kind of people will be on our side, no matter what we do. But we should have John's word for it that he is not going to play fair, before we take any drastic step."

The Fultons left Aiken, and after what seemed to me a decent delay of a few days, I followed them to New York. John seemed further than ever from coming to a decision, so Lucy thought. But she evinced a more patient spirit. For the young woman with credit and a fondness for clothes New York is a great solace, even if she is half broken-hearted.

"The contract with the Russian has gone through," she said; "John will make a lot of money. I tell him that it's horrid to get rich by making things that are used to kill people with, but he says there are too many people in the world, and that most of them would be the better for a little killing —so he's given me a fine credit, and I'm buying all the clothes I need."

"Lucy, I don't think you ought to spend his money—any more than you absolutely have to—considering."

"We spoke of that. He said I'd hurt him enough, and that while I was still ostensibly his

wife, he wished me to have all that he could give me."

"While you are still ostensibly his wife? That sounds as if—Oh, as if he was going to step out, Lucy, doesn't it?"

"Sometimes he talks as if it was all arranged. He says, 'Next year, if you shouldn't happen to be with me, I'll do so and so,' and all that sort of talk. At other times he talks of building a big house down on Long Island—just the kind of house I've always wanted—just as if he was sure that I would still be living with him."

Well, one day Fulton came to my hotel and sent up his card. I went down to him as quickly as I could finish dressing. He said:

"Sorry to trouble you, but my time isn't quite my own. This seemed a golden opportunity. We've a lot to talk over. I've a taxi outside. Will you drive around a little?"

"Certainly, if you'll just wait while I telephone."

I called up Lucy.

"I can't meet you this morning, I am to have a talk with John. Somehow I feel sure that something is going to be decided." My heart was beating quick and fast. I was unaccountably excited.

This excitement seemed to communicate itself to Lucy. She said as much.

"I'm terribly excited," she said, and her voice had a kind of wild, triumphant note in it. "You'll tell me everything the minute you can?"

"Of course. Good luck."

"Good luck."

We drove across Forty-third Street and up the crowded Avenue for several blocks without speaking. Then Fulton smiled a little and spoke in a level, easy voice.

"Perhaps," he said, "the water is not so cold as it looks. Shall we take the plunge?"

"By all means," I said. My heart was thumping nervously. I hoped he would not notice it.

"Lucy and I," he said, "as you know, were wonderfully happy for a good many years. Until last winter, I was never away from her over night. And then, only because of a financial crisis. I have never even looked at another woman with desire, or thought of one. Until last winter, Lucy was the same about other men. She was a wonderful little mother to her kids, and the most faithful, loving, valiant wife that ever belonged to a man full of cares and worries."

"I know all this, John," I said; "I could wish that you had been unhappy together."

"I wish to make several things clear," he said. "According to all civil and moral law, I am an absolutely undivorceable man. There is only one ground for divorce in this state. To clear the decks for you and Lucy, I should have to smirch myself and take a black eye."

"But the people who count always understand these things."

"In order to secure my own unhappiness, to make it everlasting, I should have to perjure myself. I know that it is the custom of the country for married gentlemen who are no longer loved to perjure themselves. But it seems to me a custom that would bear mending. However, it is not yet a question of that."

"Still undecided?"

"No. My mind is made up. I am prepared to step down and take my black eye on certain conditions."

I bowed my head.

"Lucy," he said, "doesn't love the children as much as I do. She has allowed herself to forget how dear they are to her, so it would have to be

understood among us three that I should retain the children. You see, I've got to keep something of what belongs to me—to keep me going. Lucy will agree to this, because just now all she wants is new clothes and you. There is another point upon which I feel that I must be satisfied."

"What is that?"

"How long is your young people's infatuation for each other going to last? If it is to be brief and evanescent, it would be absurd for me to take a black eye. But if it is to be stable and enduring, I should be ashamed to stand in the way of it. Knowing something of Lucy's history, how long do you think her fancy for you will last?"

"These things are on the lap of the gods."

"Well, then, yours for her? Now, I *know* that my love for her, which has been tried by fire and ice and time, will last until I die, or lose my reason. With me it is not a question of *thinking*, but of *knowing*. How long do you *know* that your love for her will last?"

"That is an impossible question to answer. I think it will always last."

"Thought won't do, Archie, on this all-important phase of the situation, we must have the light of

definite knowledge. Now, as a man who has had many love affairs, some innocent and some not, you should have a good working knowledge of your endurance in such matters. If you were cast away on a desert island with a very pretty woman, you to whom women have always been necessary, you from whose hand there has always been some woman or other ready to eat, how long would your love for Lucy last?"

I was amazed momentarily by his question, but it was not one which I could answer.

"A week?" He rather shot this at me, and for a moment there was a satiric gleam in his eye.

I nodded.

"You *know* that it would last a week?"

I began to feel a little angry, and I said, quite sharply: "I *know* it."

"A month?"

"Yes, a month."

Both our voices had risen. His became easy and level once more.

"A year, Archie?"

"How can I know that, John?" I tried to meet his quick change of manner. "I *think* so. I'm very sure of it."

"But you don't know?"

"I can't *know.*"

"And if the very pretty woman on the island came to you in the night and said she had seen hobgoblin eyes in the dark, and was afraid—how long, though you still love her, would you be faithful to Lucy? A man like you, in good health, with an incompletely developed moral sense?"

"We are getting nowhere," I said, determined to keep my temper.

"We are getting to this," said he, "that if a year from today, you and Lucy still love each other, and have been faithful to each other, and still want each other—you shall have each other."

"A year?" I think he smiled at the surprise and disappointment in my voice.

"During which year," he said, "you will not meet each other except by accident, and you will not correspond."

I said nothing, but he read my thoughts.

"It isn't fair to you and Lucy? At least it is fair to me. Nobody has thought about me. I have had to think for myself, and for the children. Admit this—if your love stands a year's test you will stand a far greater chance of happiness than if you ran

away together now, unblessed by the man you had wronged, and unclergied. Admit this, too—that if your love doesn't stand the test, then my life has been ruined for as futile, puerile, misbegotten a passion as ever reared its head under an honest man's roof. Admit it! Admit it."

"I'm not sure that I admit any such thing."

"Then, my dear fellow," he said, "your mental and moral capacity are on precisely the same plane. . . . I'm sure you don't want to injure Lucy. Give her this chance to straighten out and get untangled. If there is any truth in your love for her you will see that this way is best for her."

"I am thinking of her happiness."

"*Are* you?"

"She's been very patient, John. I can't tell you how patient."

"For God's sake don't try to tell me. Haven't I had enough to bear?"

"I think Lucy won't be willing to wait a year."

"She must be made willing. You must help. A year soon passes—soon passes. If things then are as they are now, then I shall believe that your love for each other is strong and fine, and I shall renounce my claim with a good grace—a good grace."

"If we can't wait a year, John!"

"You mean if you won't? In that case I shall not feel that Lucy is entitled to a divorce, or either of you to any money at my hands. Among the people who are necessary to you and Lucy, a wronged and upright husband has great power. If you are such children, such fools, as not to be willing to stand a test of your love, you will have to be punished. It would mean that your passion has nothing to do with what is understood by love. You would merely be pointed at and passed up as a rather well-known young couple with adulterous proclivities."

There was a long, charged silence.

"The law and the prophets are all on your side, John, but——"

"You'll not answer now, please. You'll think it over. And don't forget all the pleasant things that you can do in a year. There's that hunting trip in Somaliland you used to talk about so much—there's London and Paris—wonderful places for a man who's trying to cure himself of an unlawful love."

"Trying to *cure* himself?"

"Of course. Jesting aside, don't you think that what you and Lucy want to do to Jock and Hurry and me is *wrong?* Of course you do. You're not a

devil. If, by uttering the wish, you could bring it about that you had never loved Lucy, that she had never fallen out of love with me and loved you over the heads of her children, that all might be as it was when you first began to come to our house, wouldn't you utter that wish? Of course you would."

He was smiling at me now, very gently and cunningly, and there was, at the same time, in his eyes an awful pathos.

"Why, yes," I said, "I suppose so."

"Just bear out what I've always maintained," said he; "I've always maintained that you were a good fellow—at heart."

"Am I to see Lucy again—before the year begins?"

"Is it very necessary?"

"I suppose not. But——"

"Well, I imagine Lucy will insist on seeing you. It will be a pity, but after all she's only a little child in some ways. It's all going to be very hard for you both, at first," he said gently. "So you shall see each other again—if she says so."

Suddenly he reached out his hand, and I took it.

"Oh," he said, "I needed your help."

XXX

IT seemed to me, at the time, that I had showed myself very weak in the conference in the taxi-cab. It seemed to me that my acquiescence in Fulton's proposals reflected on the strength of my love for Lucy. Perhaps it did. But in the clearer light of today it seems to me that to his questions I made the only answers possible; and that only a demented person could have found serious flaws in the logic of his position.

When we had parted, I walked for a long time in the most crowded streets, trying to reconcile myself to the long separation from Lucy, and to the weakness which I thought I had betrayed in agreeing to it.

Could I endure that separation? The world would be empty with no Lucy to go to, no Lucy even to hear from. I loved her too much to part with all but the thought of her. It did not seem possible that the mere passage of time could dull the edge of my passion. Yet cold memory blinked at this very possibility.

I had parted from other women, thinking that thoughts of them must fill the rest of my life to the exclusion of everything else; only to find that after a little lapse of time their images faded, and even the memory of what they had been to me had no power to think.

So might it be with Lucy. "You know it *might,*" said cold memory. "Don't be a fool—you think it *won't,* but you know it might."

"But," I argued, "this is different. No other woman ever loved me as she does. I may be a fool, but her eyes have spoken, and I know the truth when I hear it."

"She *does* love you," said my other self, which I have called cold memory, "and she did love him, and before his time, others, if only briefly. Without the sight of you to feed on, her love will starve and die. It is almost always so."

"Almost."

"There are exceptions. Is it likely, considering your records, that you and she will be an exception? It is not likely."

It wasn't. John Fulton was probably right. He believed that time would cure us, and almost the whole of human experience agreed with him.

And wouldn't it be better if we were cured? Far better. I had to admit that. We ought, indeed, to hope that we should be cured; to help with all our strength in the effecting of that cure. And conversely, Lucy ought to try to return to her affection for John and to her duty.

Suddenly I felt cold and shivery as before undergoing an operation.

Poor little Lucy! Even now she must be listening to John's ultimatum, as I had listened, but with this difference; she could not see the justice and the logic of his position. She would only see that she was being cruelly hurt, and thwarted, and disappointed; that she was being curbed and punished by forces too strong for her to cope with. And I pictured her, all reserve gone at last, a tortured child—just sobbing. It seemed to me that I must go to her or die. And indeed I went a little way toward their hotel. Then I thought, perhaps her sobs would move him to a change of heart. Perhaps he will weaken, and let her go. Upon the strength of this thought I returned to my own hotel, rearing a blissful edifice of immediate happiness.

I sat in the lobby in a position of reading, a newspaper before my face; but I did not read. I was

listening for the boy who would page me to the telephone. Many names were called in the lobby, but it was two o'clock before I started at the sound of my own.

Fulton was at the other end of the telephone, not Lucy. He sounded very much upset and depressed: "Lucy would like to see you right away, if you can come round."

"Of course."

We said no more.

Her face was white and tear-stained. I had no sooner closed the door of their sitting-room behind me, than she flung herself upon my breast and burst into a storm of sobs. After a long time words began to mingle with the sobs.

"It will kill me. Why does he want me to die? . . . I've only got you. . . . I want to belong to you—to you."

I talked and I talked, and I soothed and I soothed, but she was sick with grief and pain and a kind of insane resentment, as if she had gone through a major operation without an anesthetic. It would have been horrible to see anybody suffer so. And she was the woman I loved! The strain was so great upon me that at last my powers of resistance

snapped. I flung honor to the winds, and became strong with resolution. And now my words seemed to pierce her consciousness and to calm her.

"It's all right, Lucy." I had to speak loudly at first, as if she was deaf. "You shan't suffer like this. I tell you you shan't—not if I am damned to hell."

I knew now that she was listening, the sobs became muffled and less frequent. "It's you and me against the world now," I said. "There'll be no more flimflamming. I promised John to wait a year. That doesn't matter. A promise made at your expense won't hold. . . . When is your husband coming back?"

". . . hour," was all the answer I got. . . .

"Then there's not much time left. Try to pull yourself together. We've got to make all our plans right now, and there's not much time."

"You *will* take me away?"

"Of course. Now listen. There's no sense in putting your husband on his guard. Let him think that we are both agreed to the year's probation. I'll look up things and engage passage. I'll do that this afternoon. Tonight I'll go to Hot Springs to see my father and get money. My own balance is very low, unfortunately. Day after tomorrow I'll be in

town again. Now, how are we going to communicate?"

I can't say that she was calm now, but she no longer sobbed, and her mind was in working order again.

"By telephone," she said. "Every morning when I know John's plans for the day I'll let you know, and so you'll know when to call me up."

Already the anticipations of our great adventure were bringing back the color to her cheeks and the sparkle to her eyes. I smiled at her. "Don't be too cheerful," I said; "we might get ourselves suspected."

"Couldn't we just tell John that we had decided to go—and go?"

"Better not."

"I hate to deceive and play act and be underhanded."

"So do I—but—Lucy, darling, you're going to trust me in more important things than this. I *think* my way is best. We don't want any more agonies and recriminations and scenes. *Do* we?"

I took her in my arms and whispered, "It's only a few days now, but I don't see how I can wait. I don't see how."

And she burrowed with her face between my cheek and shoulder, and whispered back, "And I don't see how I can wait."

There was a little space of very tense silence, during which my eyes roved to the little silver traveling-clock on the mantel, and then I said in a voice that shook:

"I'd better get out before he comes back."

XXXI

MY parents, loafing North, via Hot Springs, were delighted to see me. As soon as courtesy to my mother made it possible, I got my father aside, and told him that my real purpose in coming was to raise the wind.

"I need a lot of money," I said; "sooner or later you'll know why. So I may as well tell you."

My father's fine weather-beaten face of a country squire expressed an interest at once frankly affectionate and tinged with a kind of detached cynicism.

"I am going to run off with Lucy Fulton," I said.

"I supposed that was it," said my father, without evincing the least surprise.

"You *did?*"

"Oh, we old fellows put an ear to the ground now and then," he explained; "and sometimes sleep with one eye open. Punch's advice to the young couple about to marry was 'Don't.' My advice to you and Lucy is double don't. Why not give yourselves a year to think it all over, as John Fulton so sanely and generously suggests?"

Astonishment at my father's superhuman knowledge of events must have showed in my face. Still smiling with frank affection, he said, "John put me in touch with the whole situation before he left Aiken. The year of probation was my suggestion to him."

"But Lucy and I can't agree."

"Then you can't. Do you sail, fly, entrain, or row—and when?"

"We sail, father, next Wednesday."

"A week from today. I am profoundly sorry. It's very rough on Fulton, just when he has closed with this Russian contract and is by way of getting rich."

"It's our *one* chance for happiness, father."

He cocked an eyebrow at me. "And I think it is your one sure road to misery."

"But you'll see me through?"

"Come to me a year from today. Tell me that during that time you have neither seen Lucy nor communicated with her, but that you still love each other—*then* I'll see you *through.*"

"My dear father, it's so much better for you to put up the money than for me to borrow it from one of my friends."

"Only because the friend would expect you to pay him back. How would you live when his money was gone—keep on borrowing?"

"Why, father, you're acting like a parent in an old-fashioned novel. Are you threatening to cut me off?"

"My son," said he, "a man who had done well, and who deserved well of the world came to me and showed me his heart—a heart tormented beyond endurance with unreturned love, with jealousy, and with despair. He threw himself upon my mercy. And I said that I would help him, with whatever power of help I have at command. I don't love that man, my son. I love you. But I am on his side. All my fighting blood is aroused when I learn that still another American husband has been wronged by his wife, and by an idle flirting bachelor. God keep me firm in what must seem to you like cruelty in one to whom you have always turned with the utmost frankness and loyalty in your emergencies. And from whom until this moment you have always received help."

I was appalled and thunderstruck. After a while I said, "Father, she sobbed so that I thought she would break a blood vessel. I couldn't stand it. I

had to say I would take her away. If I don't, I think she will die or kill herself."

My father drew himself up very straight, and looked very handsome and stern, for a moment. Then his frame relaxed and his eyes twinkled, and he said, "Die? Kill herself? My grandmother!"

"Oh, father," I cried, "don't! Don't! She is all the world to me. You talk as if——"

"I talk as if she was an excellent example of the modern American wife in what the papers call 'society.' And that is precisely what she is. You know that as well as I do. Just because you love her is no reason for pretending that she's a saint and a martyr and the victim of a grand historical passion. She *is* lovely to look at. She *is* charming to be with. But that doesn't prevent her from being a bad little egg."

"Father," I said, as gently as I could, "I love her with all my heart. Why, she's like a little child, and she's being so hurt. You've never refused me anything. Help me to make her happy."

"When she has gotten over her fancy for you, when Fulton has plenty of money for her to spend, she will be as happy as she deserves to be—until she

makes herself miserable again by indulging in some affair similar to this. Now, my dear boy, go back to her, tell her that you haven't enough money to elope on and no way of getting it. Tell her also that if at the end of a year's probation you and she still want each other, nobody will oppose you, and that you, on the day of your marriage to her, will be made a rich man in your own right."

"Father, I *want* her so."

"And I *want* champagne so," said my father. "And the accursed doctor has forbidden it. Do I torture myself? Not at all. I turn for solace to an excellent bottle of Scotch whiskey. And this has at least the effect of making me want the champagne less. Don't get confused between psychology and physiology. If I were in your boots I'd slip over to Paris—and drink Scotch wriskey."

So I went back to New York, and, as soon as possible, I talked to Lucy over the telephone, and told her about the interview with my father.

"But," I finished, "we'll do whatever you say. We can't very well land in Europe without any money; but I've still got most of the passage money; and if you say so, we can stay right in this country and live on that for a few weeks, while I try to get a job.

I could borrow some money, but it would have to be paid back. Oh, Lucy, this is such a humiliating confession to make, but what *can* I do?"

"Everybody is against us," she said, "everything —I don't suppose there's any use struggling."

She sounded cold and tired.

"I suppose," she went on slowly, "we'll have to wait, the way John says. Shall we?"

"You say it, Lucy. Don't make me say it."

"So we'll wait," she said; "not see each other, and not communicate. I don't see how I can stand it, but I suppose I can. . . . A whole year—a whole year!"

"At the end of it, my darling, all that there is in the world for me, nobody will stand in our way; there'll be plenty of money and a long life before us."

"Listen . . . all the long time will you take care of yourself?"

"Yes, Lucy."

"And not notice any other ladies?" . . .

"Lucy . . . let's take a chance on what I have got."

A long silence. Then: "Oh, no. I suppose John's right. Everybody's right. . . . But"—there

was a valiant ring in her voice, "we'll show 'em they were wrong and cruel. Won't we?"

"Yes, Lucy."

"Good-by, then, and God bless and keep you."

"It's only for a year, Lucy."

I heard a short, dry sob. It was mine.

XXXII

I DON'T know how I got through the next ten days. After three of them had passed I began to fear a mental breakdown, because my mind kept working all by itself, without orders. If I wanted to think forward, to the end of the probationary year, I couldn't. Always I kept thinking I ought to have done, or said, so and so. I ought to have been firmer. I was always reviving that drive in the taxicab with Fulton, or that last interview with my father. If my love was strong and fine I ought never to have knuckled under. They had had too easy a time with me. I had played into their hands, and they had treated me like a child. From pure humiliation I could not sleep at night.

And what was Lucy doing? How was she bearing it? What sort of life was she leading, the poor, abused child? The world seemed to have all joined against me in a conspiracy of silence. Nobody mentioned Lucy in my hearing. Although the same city held us, until they moved to Stamford, I had no accidental glimpse of her. Our last talk had

not been in the least satisfactory. It seemed to me that I must see her once more to preach courage and hope. During those first ten nights I hardly slept at all. Sometimes I would picture out Lucy's whole course of life during the next few months. And I imagined that, grown at last utterly indifferent through suffering, she might drift back into her former relations with Fulton, if only because he loved her so much, and no one can keep on saying no forever. Such imaginings had sometimes the vividness of scenes actually witnessed and threw me into tortures of jealousy.

Not until a short period of the tenth day was Lucy ever actually out of my mind. I had been sitting in a chair staring at a newspaper, all my nerves tense and hungry, when suddenly they seemed to have relaxed and to have been fed. The skin of my face no longer seemed tightly stretched. I felt as if I had waked from a refreshing sleep; but this was not the case. I had simply, without deliberation, forgotten Lucy for half an hour, and been making agreeable personal plans for the year of probation.

"Good Lord," I thought; "has living without her, already begun to be easier?"

It had. I began to take pleasure in seeing my friends; to look forward to the Newport season, to the international tennis, to the golf championship at Ekwanok, to the thousand and one things that make for the happiness of a butterfly's summer.

After a month of Newport, days passed with only hurried thoughts of Lucy. Chance mention of her name gave me no uneasiness; they affected my heart, like sudden trumpets, but I knew that my face had become an inscrutable mask, and that my voice was in perfect control. Those who had thought that there was something between us began to think differently.

And then, after days of suspense, surmise, and real consternation, the legs of civilization seemed to have been knocked from under it, and the greatest nations of Europe flew at each other.

Now indeed there seemed an easy way to the year's end. The Germans rolled through Belgium and into France, outraging humanity. It looked as if they would roll right into Paris, and sow salt where the world's first city had stood.

I rushed up to Bar Harbor to tell my parents that I was going to France to enlist in the foreign legion. Oh, how swiftly the time would fly, I thought. That

I might get crippled or killed never occurred to me. I thought only that having failed at everything else, I must obviously be possessed of military genius. I pictured myself climbing the bloody ladder of promotion to high command and winning the gratitude of that country which next to my own I love the most.

My mother, to whom I first broached the news, did not cry or make a fuss. But I saw that I had distressed her terribly.

"It isn't our war," she said; "and what use will one more enlisted man be to *them?* And besides, my dear, *only* sons are always the first ones to get hurt; only sons and men whose families are dependent upon them. But . . ." and here she gave me a wonderful look . . . "I think I know why you want to go. And that makes me very proud."

"I think you *do* know, Mumsey," I said. "It's because we'd rather get hurt trying to do something worth while, than go on the way we've always gone on, amounting to nothing, and disappointing everybody."

Then she got me in her arms, and cried over me a little.

My father, as usual, took my decision with the most good-natured indifference.

"Fine experience," he said, "for any man that's free to go. Makes me wish I were younger and without obligations. Still I can enjoy the music at the swimming-pool with a free conscience; because I'm sending over all the money I can spare. . . . How did you reach the conclusion that you could go?"

"*Could* go?"

"Yes. Of course you've no complication in your life that should keep you from going. Well, I'm glad of that."

"It seems to me that if anyone is free to go, I am."

He smiled upon me, somewhat too playfully for my comfort, and shook his head slowly. "So Fulton and I were right about the year's probation. I'm delighted. How soon did you and Lucy find out that absence *doesn't* make the heart grow fonder?"

"Oh," I said, "it isn't *that*. What has that to do with it? There's a year to be got over, and fighting's the most agreeable and the quickest way I can think of just now."

My father looked disappointed.

"I hoped you had got over caring. And—you haven't?"

For a few moments I met his eyes. But only for a few moments. He didn't laugh. "I'm glad," he said simply.

I tried to explain exactly how I felt.

"Of course not seeing her or hearing from her—why—you see—but when I do see her it will all come right back. I *know* that."

He smiled a little grimly. "Normally," he said, "there are years of pleasant living before you. But not if you get yourself killed—not if you lose an arm or a leg, or come back with half your face shot off, and your one remaining ear stone deaf from cannon fire. But anyway I'm glad the Fulton business is over. Your love has cooled and, even if Lucy's hasn't—there could never be anything between you now?"

He was speaking sarcastically. He went on in the same vein: "The year over—even if you found that Lucy was still wrapped up in you, that her happiness depended on you, you would not, of course, feel that you were under any obligation to *pretend* that you still cared for her and to do a gentleman's best to make her happy."

"I get your point, father," I said; "and of course if she still cares, I must try to make good. Of course I must."

"Suppose," he said, no longer sarcastically, but very earnestly, "suppose the year is up. Suppose Lucy still cares, and as a reward for her faithfulness and her patience there is nothing but your grave 'somewhere in France'? This is why I asked you if you *could* go."

"I'll look like a fool," I said. "I've told several people that I was surely going."

"That's too bad," he said; "but you'll have to stand it. You have a good reputation for physical pluck, though, and nobody will say anything very nasty. And as for us," his voice rang a little, "who are on the inside, we know that it is braver of you to stay than to go."

"Anyway," I said, "if she—if Lucy—doesn't care any more—why I can go then."

"You can go *then*. But it seems to me that a man of education is wasted in a trench. That, however, is a matter of taste."

XXXIII

IT was not until the early winter that I saw Lucy. It was by accident. I sat just behind her at a musical comedy. She was with her husband. They looked very prosperous. They seemed to be comradely enough. Mostly I saw only the back of her head; once, her full profile; and then at last she turned half around in her seat, and saw me. I don't know what I did. I think I smiled, half rose to my feet, and lifted my hand as if to take off a hat—which of course I didn't have on. She nodded, and smiled brightly; but her eyes had that expression of praying that I have so often mentioned.

It was long since I had thought of her for more than a few minutes at a time. But now my heart began to beat furiously and all my sleeping love for her waked in my heart.

And now she was telling her husband *who* was sitting just behind them.

I went out after the act, intending to stay out. But Fulton followed so quickly that he caught me

just as I was leaving the theater. "Hello, Archie," he said.

"Hello, John. How are you all?"

"Pretty well," he said; "and you?"

"Pretty well. Cartridges still looking up?"

"Yes. We're doubling the capacity of the plant for the second time since the war started. Have a drink?"

We walked to the nearest saloon. "We heard that you were going to enlist."

"I did think of it, and then I got cold feet."

"Like hell you did!"

"Well, reasons against it were found for me. Reasons which I ought to have thought of for myself. Here's how."

"Santé!" said John. A moment later, "Going to Aiken?" he asked.

"Why, it depends."

There was an awkward silence.

"Lucy is very anxious," he then said, "to open our house again this winter."

"As a matter of fact," said I glibly, "I've more than half decided on Palm Beach."

A bell rang shrilly.

"Time to go back," he said.

"One moment, John. I'm not going back—of course. How is Lucy?"

"Oh, pretty well," he said stiffly; "I think she'll come through all right. Had a tough time for a while."

Upon that he hurried off to rejoin her, and I turned my face once more to the bar, and gave an order. I felt as if I had been through a terrible ordeal. I was all in.

From now on I heard more often of the Fultons, for they were leading a conspicuously gay life. Somebody had loaned them a house for six weeks, and by all accounts Lucy was making money fly.

I saw her in the distance three times. Twice to bow and exchange smiles. The other time she didn't see me. Seeing her meant two or three days of torture; then her image and desirability would begin to fade once more. But at least no other woman interested me in the least.

Presently they went to Aiken. A few days later I entrained for Palm Beach; but found that I could not stand the place or the pace for long periods of time, and fell into the habit of commuting with New York. It was the war, I think, which madé me so

restless. It seemed to me that the night had not been well slept, nor the most promising day well begun until I had read the headlines in the papers. My hot wish to fight as a soldier had cooled. More and more I wanted to be of service, but in some way which seemed to me more imaginative and intelligent. But I could not hit on the way. I must go to Paris, I thought, then surely the inspiration of helpfulness would come. But I could not very well go to Paris until the year of probation was up. If Lucy still cared—well, it would be easy enough for me to care. I knew now that her physical presence was sufficient to make me care—at any given moment. "Oh," I thought, "I can't lose. Either I'll go to Paris and be useful, or I'll begin a new life with the girl I love who loves me."

Late in February Harry Colemain joined me at Palm Beach. He had wintered at Aiken, and I had all the Aiken news from him. The place had never been so full—people who usually went abroad, etc., etc.—some delightful new people, about all the old standbys. It was not a sporting winter. Most of the men were feeling too poor for high stakes. Would I believe it, the golf course was crowded all day? The new hotel? It looked as if it was going

to be a success. The clubs were having the biggest year in their history. The golf club would be able to reset the green with Bermuda grass. Some of the holes had come through the summer splendidly. Some were better than they ever had been, others were worse, etc., etc.

I asked him about this and about that. At last I said: "How are the Fultons?"

"Well, John comes and goes. He seems to have gotten back his health. The kids are fine . . . of course they are not what they *were* as a family. That's obvious. But Lucy seems to have come to her senses. She was very gay at first. Then she went round looking—well, she looked frightened. Lots of people noticed it. It was as if the doctor had told her she had lung trouble. She quit riding and dropped out of everything—except very quiet little dinners. Then she got very interested in her yard, and had experts over from Berckman's and did a lot of new planting . . ."

"But why did she look frightened? There wasn't anything the matter, was there?"

"Well, you know the trouble she made for John, wouldn't be his wife and all that? Well, he seems to have won her round to his way of looking at com-

promise—or she got more or less fond of him again. I don't know."

"I don't quite understand what you're driving at."

"You *don't?* Why, she's to have a baby. And everybody who knew there had been trouble says, 'Thank God for that.' "

My hands began to tremble so that I had to hide them under the table at which we were sitting.

"Bully, isn't it?" said Harry; fortunately he had turned his head to look at two very lovely young women who had strolled into the palm garden.

"Bully," I said.

"See those two, Archie?" he said in a guarded voice.

"Sure I see them."

"One of 'em's the famous Mrs. Paxton, who——"

"I know."

"Met her last autumn at——" He rose suddenly to his feet, and advanced to meet the two women. "Hello, there! Glad to see you."

Mrs. Paxton's cool demure face broke into a delighted smile.

"Why, Harry!" she exclaimed. "Miss Coles, let me introduce Mr. Colemain."

A moment later Harry had dragged me forward

(literally) and I was being introduced. Miss Coles had very beautiful brown eyes, very white teeth, and a very deep dimple.

"Why," said Harry, "shouldn't all you good people dine with me?"

"Why not?" exclaimed Mrs. Paxton.

I started to say that I had a pressing engagement, discovered Miss Coles' exceedingly beautiful eyes lifted to mine, and saw upon her face an expression of the most alluring mockery, and so—"Why not?" said I.

We had a long and a merry dinner. I felt defiant of life, a man without responsibilities, who owed nothing and to whom nothing was owed.

After dinner we went strolling in the moonlight. Harry and Mrs. Paxton strolled in one direction, Miss Coles and I in another.

Miss Coles looked very beautiful, and she wore an expression of childlike proprietorship which was very becoming to her.

"Why are you *Miss* Coles?" I asked.

"I'm not—really." Her voice was little more than a whisper. "It's more fun to be *Miss* while the divorce is pending. I'm from California—nobody knows me here."

"And you're getting a divorce?"

She nodded slowly. And then with a flash of engaging frankness: "No, I'm not," she said; "*he* is."

"Oh!"

We strolled on in silence for a moment, and then as if by agreement came to a sudden halt and looked at each other.

Then she laughed softly, her head tilted back, and her round bare throat showing very white in the moonlight.

I threw my cigar into a bed of scarlet flowers.

XXXIV

I HAD passed through one of those stages of mental and spiritual depression during which a man does not even ask forgiveness of himself for any of his acts. If "Miss" Coles had wished me to marry her I would have done so; but the suggestion was never made by either of us. We parted, a little gloomily, but not unhappily, and before there was even a breath of scandal. It was just after she heard that her husband had secured his decree against her. That hard cold fact, that proof of things which no woman likes to have proved against her, seemed to sober her, you may say, and bring her up with a round turn. From now on she was going to be good, she said. No. I mustn't blame myself for anything. Everything was her fault. Everything always had been. I was ashamed too? She was glad of that. We'd always be good friends. Why, yes! From a friend, yes—if he was really as rich as all that. It would help her to look around, to get her bearings for the new and better life. It had been a frightfully expensive winter. It had

been sweet of me to keep her rooms so full of flowers. She loved flowers. . . . Oh, nobody was hurt much, and nobody but us anyway.

Reform is a great thing. I learned from Harry that the very night I left Palm Beach she lost all the money I had "conveyed" to her at gambling, and only the other day she ran off with a man I know very well indeed—and a married man at that. I hope she won't talk too much in the first few weeks of her infatuation.

I reached New York feeling like the cad that I suppose I am. But it was pretty bitter hearing about Lucy, and the baby. At least I had kept faith longer than she had. I wondered if she once more loved her husband. Did I hope so? Yes, of course, in the same way that you express conventional horror when you hear of the latest famine in China.

Well, for better for worse, I was a free man again. Free—if it is free to be tormented by remorse, to feel cheap, futile, a waster—a thing of no account to anyone. If this is freedom it isn't good to be free. No man is happy who comes and goes as he pleases. There must be responsibilities to shoulder, and ties which bind him. If he lives for himself alone and for what, in the first glad bursts

of unattachment he imagines to be pleasure, a day will come when the acid of self-contempt begins to corrode him.

I determined to go to France, via London for I needed clothes, and if I had a definite place it was to volunteer as a nurse in the American hospital. So I took out a passport, and engaged my passage.

A few days later, while crossing from Madison Avenue to Fifth, I found myself suddenly face to face with Hilda. She averted her head and tried to pass without being recognized, but I called her name, and she stopped short and turned back.

"It's just to ask how you are getting on, Hilda."

"I've just left Mrs. Fulton," she said; "I'm going home."

"Home?"

"England."

"You don't mean it! But why?"

"Oh," she said, "it's all gotten on my nerves—the war. I want to help. I've saved enough money to take me over, and to keep me if I have to look round a bit."

"I'm going over, too," I said.

"To help?"

"Oh, Hilda, I don't know. I *hope* so."

"Oh, I hope so, too, Mr. Mannering."

"But, Hilda, I want to talk to you. There may not be another chance. Where are you going *now?*"

"I'm staying with friends till I sail."

"Well, tell them you're going for a motor ride with another friend, and to dine somewhere along the Sound, will you?"

"Oh, I couldn't, not very well."

"Hilda," I said, "there are so many things I want to know, and only you can tell me about Stamford—about last winter—is it true that Mrs. Fulton is going——?"

"Yes, she is."

We were silent for a moment. Then she spoke. "Do you still——?"

"No, I don't *think* so, Hilda."

"Then I'll come—if you want me to, and think I ought. But if any of your friends——?"

"Do I have to tell you that you are one of the smartest looking people I know, Hilda? They'll think you are the Marchioness of Amber——" I glanced at her red hair, which did have amber lights in it, "and they'll envy. So do come. Will you?"

I borrowed a fine new racing runabout, and at six o'clock called for her at the address she had given

me. She had gotten herself up with the most discreet good taste, and looked perfectly charming. She must have read the approval in my glance, for the color flew to her cheeks, and she looked triumphantly pleased.

"Going to be warm enough?"

"Yes, thank you."

"It's mighty nice of you to come."

"Oh, when you held out half an excuse to me, I couldn't help coming."

"What's your idea—for England? To be a nurse—or what?"

"A nurse, sir."

"I'm not *sir,* please. I'm going to be a nurse, too. I told you once that I'd always be your friend. And a friend isn't ever sir. So don't do it again."

"I'll not," she said.

Presently I began to ask her about the Fultons. At first her answers were short and unsatisfactory, but presently she began to warm to the topic.

Stamford? Oh, it had been awful. The house had never been divided in its allegiance, but nobody could have remained callous to Mrs. Fulton's grief. Meals were especially awful. Mr. and Mrs. Fulton tried to make conversation. Sometimes just when

it seemed as if she was going to be a little cheerful—phist! her eyes would fill with tears, and she would bolt from the room. At such times Mr. Fulton's face was a study of pity for her and grief for them both. She was good to the children; no question about that. Sometimes she grabbed them into her arms and hugged them too hard. It was as if she was trying by sheer physical effort to give them back what she had taken away from them.

Sometimes one thought one heard little Hurry crying very softly and bitterly, and it would turn out to be Mrs. Fulton, locked in her bedroom. Pressure of business, success, kept Mr. Fulton going. Sometimes the two tried to talk things over. But it was an irritating, mosquitoey house. Always their voices ended by rising to the point where they could be heard all over the ramshackle paper-thin dwelling.

It stood on a lawn that sloped to tidal waters, very ugly and muddy at low tide. A long gangway reached to a float for boats; here the water was deep enough to dive into at half tide. Often at dawn, if the tide was right, and you happened to be awake, you might see Mr. Fulton descend the wet lawn in wrapper and bare feet for the swim that seemed to make up to him for his sleepless nights. You knew

that he was in trouble by the way that he took to the water. It's always a little shivery at dawn, but he never hesitated. His wrapper was coming off by the time he reached the float—it was too far off to mind watching him—and into the water he'd go, head first, as quick as he could get in. It was almost as if he was afraid he'd die before he got to it. He was a fine swimmer, but oftenest he just lay about, sometimes with his face under. Then he looked like a drowned man. Sometimes he went in earlier than dawn. She had seen phosphorescence off the float in the black night, and heard the clean, quiet splash of his dive.

Once he stayed in so long that Mrs. Fulton called to him from her window, "*Please* come in, John, I'm frightened." Oh, yes, she wanted to be free from him, perhaps she still does, but not that way. If anything had happened to him, if he had taken his life, for instance, one imagined that in the first agonies of remorse she would have taken hers too.

It must have been terrible for her—at first—never hearing from *you,* not knowing where you were, or what you were doing, whether you were sick or well. Of course she wanted you to be happy, but with *her.*

It would have been a comfort to know that you were suffering as much as she was. And she couldn't know.

She had a calendar in her room. She kept tab on it of the days as they passed, beginning with the first day of the probationary year. She'd draw a line through each day—each day when she went to bed, and hoped that the day was really over. She had her bad, wicked, black, sleepless nights, too. You could always tell by how late she was in the morning. She had a child's happy faculty of being able to make up for lost sleep. Well, when the day seemed over she drew a line through it. One day the chambermaid came below stairs (it was the first we knew of it) and propounded a conundrum. "When is a day not a day?" No one could guess. So she said, "When Mrs. Fulton doesn't draw a line through it." So it seemed that the forty-ninth day of her probation had not been a passage of time. Time had stood still. Why? Well, in the afternoon Mrs. Fulton had gone as crew with a young gentleman who owned a knockabout, and they had got wet to the skin, and had won a leg on some pennant or other after a close, well-sailed race. Mrs. Fulton had come home about dark, drenched, blooming, buoy-

ant, and chattering about the events of the afternoon. She had had her first heart-felt good time of the probationary year. For once, time had not dragged. Time had stood excitingly, exhilaratingly still. She had forgotten to scratch off the day.

Things went better after that. Twice a week, rain or shine, she was crew of the young gentleman's knockabout. Often they went for practice sails. Sometimes they took Jock and Hurry. In hot weather they wore bathing suits. The young gentleman? He was to be a Yale senior, come autumn. He rowed on the Yale crew. My! you should have seen his arms and legs—so strong and so brown, so becoming to his dark blue bathing suit. His hair was so sunburnt that it looked like molasses candy. He could stay in the water all day and fetch from the bottom anything that was thrown in for him. Sometimes he came to meals. He was very quiet and shy. He blushed a good deal. And there was a weight on his mind. He had a condition to make up—political economy. He could hold Jock and Hurry out at arm's length, one in each hand, but the weight on his mind was too much for him. Every time the Fultons mentioned it to him, he groaned. He was truly comical when he groaned. Toward

autumn he began to get gloomy. Summer was over, college would open. No more sails; no more Mrs. Fulton. Below stairs one knew that he was in love with Mrs. Fulton. How? Well, when one let him out at the front door, he always drew in a sigh that he held all the way to the front gate. One waited to hear him let it out. It would have blown out a gas jet across a good-sized room. There were other ways of telling. And since the forty-ninth day that was not a day, no one had heard Mrs. Fulton crying.

He came to say good-by. One never knew just what happened. They were in the front hall. Suddenly the front door must have opened. Fulton must have come in, for suddenly one heard his laugh. It was the strangest laugh in the world, full of joy, full of laughter, and full of scorn.

He saw the young gentleman to the front gate. He clapped the young gentleman on the back, and said (the parlor maid had heard): "Don't worry! It's all right! Don't make a mountain out of a mole-hill!" and then in a different voice, "Bless you, my son!"

Then he had come back to the house still laughing, and one heard him shouting, "Where are you, Lucy?

Come here! The game's up now! You must see that for yourself! Don't be a goat!"

Did she see for herself? Oh, yes. She hadn't loved the young gentleman, not really. She had liked him enough to get over *you* being a life and death matter to her. That was all. She had liked him enough to let him kiss her at parting. That must have been what Mr. Fulton had caught them at.

"But, Hilda," I interrupted, "why didn't he tell me that it was all over, when I saw him in New York —just before Christmas?"

"Well, they couldn't know how you felt, could they? Maybe he wanted you to have your full year. Maybe he thought you'd fall down as she had, and that she'd hear of it and that it would be a lesson to her. How should *I* know?"

She told me more. The very night of the young gentleman's departure, late, a telegram had come to Mr. Fulton. She, Hilda, had gone down to the front door, signed for the telegram, and carried it to Mr. Fulton's room. He did not answer to her first light knock; nor to a first or second loud knock. She pushed the door open. The room was full of moonlight. Mr. Fulton's bed was empty. It had not been slept in.

Hilda tiptoed to the end of the corridor, laid the telegram on the floor in front of Mrs. Fulton's door, knocked very firmly, and the moment she heard someone stirring within, turned upon her heel and fled.

So much for the average strength of those grand passions upon which so many marriages are wrecked!

"Are they happy now, Hilda—the way they used to be?"

Oh no, not happy, fairly contented. She would never love him the way she used to. Her fantastics had taken the beauty plumb out of their lives. But something remained. A loving husband, an unloving, but naturally kind, good-natured and affectionate wife, trying to do her duty by the two children that were and the one that was to be.

"Oh, Mr. Mannering," said Hilda; "you mustn't blame yourself too much. If it hadn't been you, it would have been someone else. I didn't think so, but now I do. And *he* might not have been a gentleman."

XXXV

WE had dinner on the terrace of the Tamerlane Inn, overlooking the Sound.

"But, Hilda," I was arguing, toward coffee, "we might have gone on caring forever—if we hadn't been separated. Propinquity feeds love; absence starves it."

"Love? Indeed it doesn't. Fancy? Yes."

She looked straight in my eyes.

"Hilda," I said, "you—you don't still—that way—about me?"

"Don't I?" she said slowly. "Why else would I lie awake to hear Mr. Fulton go swimming? Why else would I be wanting to go with the Red Cross to the front where the bullets are?"

"But you told me in Aiken that you—that you despised me."

"It would be a poor love," she said, "that couldn't live down a little contempt that had jealousy for its father and mother."

We continued to look at each other while the waiter brought and served the coffee. Then I said:

"Hilda, I know one thing. What you've got to give ought not to go begging."

Her eyes part-way filled, but she gave her shoulders a valiant little shrug. Then, with a sudden strong emotion, and a thrill in her voice: "That's for you to say," she said.

"Do you mean that?"

"You had only to ask," she said; "ever."

I was deeply moved, and a conviction that for me there might still be something true and fine raced into my mind. And was followed by a whole host of gentle and unselfish and pitying thoughts, as to a tree at evening flocks of starlings come to roost.

"Hilda," I said, "if there is no power of loving in me, but only of fancying, still you have said that fancy feeds on propinquity. I have no right to say that I love you; no right to promise that I ever will. It's not your sweet pretty face that's moving me now. It's your power of loving—your power of loving me—your constancy—your trust—your courage in saying that these things shall not go begging—if I say they shall not. What I thought another had, what I thought I had, only you have. I dare not make promises. I dare not boast. But caring the

way you care, if you think you can make anything out of me—say so."

She thought for a while, her eyes lowered, her lips parted in a peaceful sort of smile. Then she said: "It'll be good to have heard all that."

"It'll be better to have tried," I said.

"Not if you don't want me *at all.*"

"But I do."

"Well," she said, looking up now, and a valiant ring in her sweet English voice: "If I wanted to say no, I couldn't. If I thought I ought to say no, I wouldn't. But I don't think I ought to. I think when the Lord God put what's in my heart in it, he meant for there to be *something* for me at the end of torment. So I say yes. For I've knelt on cold floors and hot floors to pray God that some day I could give myself to the man I love."

"And that shall be when you are married to him. . . . Don't look so frightened . . . it's got to be like that. Give a man a chance to make good. Do you think I'm such a fool as to throw away the love you've got for me? . . . We'll try this nursing game together, but not at the front, where the bullets are. I want us to live and to have our chance, you yours and I mine—taken together. Don't you see that I

am speaking with every ounce of sincerity there is in me? I *couldn't* take such love as yours and not make good. That's in my heart. I couldn't, I couldn't. Isn't it in my face, too—isn't it?"

She did not answer at first, only looked in my face, her eyes flooding.

Then she said: "I don't see your face any more —only a kind of glory."

We ran slowly back to the city, slowly, and very peacefully. Now and again we talked a little, and argued a little.

"But," she said, "it will ruin your life if you marry a servant. So please, please don't! What would I do when I knew I'd hurt you?"

"There's no life to ruin, Hilda. What's been is just dust and ashes. You and I—we'll live for each other, and we'll try to help where help's needed. It will be fine for me to have helped, after all these foolish years—when I did only harm, and only half-hearted harm at that."

"It would be so different if only—if only——"

"If only I loved you?" I freed one hand from the steering wheel and put my arm around her. "But you feel tenderness?"

"I feel tenderness."

I pressed her close to my side.

"Was I ever unkind to you?"

"Never."

"Tenderness and kindness—that's something to go on."

She turned her head and kissed the hand that pressed against her shoulder. It was the slightest, gentlest, softest kiss, and a lump rose in my throat.

"If the angels could see me now," she said, "and know what was in my heart, they'd die of envy."

"And what's in your heart, Hilda?"

"You," she said.

The house where she was staying had an inner and an outer door. In the obscurity between these two we stood for a little while at parting, and kissed each other.

And as soon thereafter as could be, we were quietly married.

When I began to put down this story about the Fultons, I was still head over heels in love with Lucy, and I did not know how it was all going to end. And I don't know now. I began to write before Hilda became a definite figure in my life, to write in order to pass the time. And so I wrote until I re-

alized that I had failed Lucy, and began to hope that she had failed me. Even then I expected to live the same old fleeting life of a butterfly bachelor to the end. Then I began to think that out of the thing I was writing, there was beginning to rise a kind of lesson, a preachment. It seemed to me that I was going through an experience that others would do well to know about.

Can a man live down the shame of scorching another man's happiness, after finding that the cause which drove him to do so, has lost its power to impel? I am not ashamed of having loved Lucy; I am ashamed of not having loved her enough. Thank God no greater harm was done to Fulton than was done. He has his Lucy, what there is left of her, his children, and a greater financial success than ever he hoped for. And he has had his triumph over me. He must have told her, in some of his bad moments, just what kind of a man I was—a waster, a male flirt, a man who had the impulse to raise the devil, but lacked the courage, and the character. And she knows now, after her short period of overpowering love for me and belief in me, that he was right. That is his triumph. I think he is too good a gentleman to rub it in.

My father and mother accepted Hilda with the sweetest good grace. She was not what they had hoped for; she was not what they had expected or feared. To my father it seemed, he was good enough to say so, that I had played the man. And he could not, he said, help loving any woman, whether she came from the roof of the world or its cellar, who had loved his son so faithfully and so long.

And the rings on Hilda's finger, and the pride in her new estate, and the pretty clothes that my mother helped her to buy worked a wondrous change in her. People couldn't help looking after her, she was so pretty, so graceful, and had so much faith and worship in her eyes.

We had put off our date of sailing a little, so that my friends might see that I was not ashamed of what I had done, but that I gloried in it, and that my parents showed a face of approval to the world. Those days of postponement were, I think, the best days of my life. A treasure had been given into my guardianship, and it seemed to me that I was going to be worthy of the trust.

Then, the very day before we were to sail, I met Lucy face to face in the street; and began to tremble

a little. She held out both hands; she was always so natural and frank.

"So you've done it!" she exclaimed; "I think she's *sweet,* and so good-looking."

Then the smile faded from her lips, and she made the praying eyes at me, and I knew that I had only to be with her a moment to love her.

"Of course," she said, "it's all right our meeting and speaking *now.*"

"Of course," I said, and they sounded lame words, lamely spoken.

"Do you believe in post-mortems?" she asked.

"No," I said, "but I like them."

"We—Oh, it's lucky we had parents and guardians, isn't it? When did you come to the end of your rope?"

I could only shake my head.

"Was it when you—heard about me?"

"I like post-mortems, but I don't approve of them."

So she abandoned the post-mortem.

"Tell me," she said, "why you married her? Was she an old flame?"

"No, Lucy—a new flame."

"I hope you will be very, very happy," she said.

"But you doubt it."

"Why shouldn't I?"

"Why indeed?"

"Listen. It—it wasn't any of it your fault. I tried to make you like me, and succeeded, and the harm was done—but now we've settled down to a harmless and quiet old age."

Had we? Oh, why had that pansy face and those great praying eyes come into my life again? Would it be always so when we met, the heart leaping, and the brain swimming, and the body shaken with tenderness and desire?

I spoke no word of betrayal, but so standing a little to one side of the passing crowds on the sidewalk, looking into that upturned face, seeing those eyes so sad and prayerful above the smiling mouth, I betrayed my wife for the first time, and Lucy read me like a primer, and she knew that I loved her—either *still* or once more. Of her own emotions her face told me nothing.

"I hear," she said, "that you are both to volunteer as nurses. I think that is splendid."

"If only I can live so as to help someone, Lucy. I am going to try very hard. And I am going to try

very hard to be a good husband, for my wife has showered me with noble and priceless gifts."

After a moment: "I hope," said Lucy, "you're going on the American line. The Germans seem to be torpedoing everything else in sight."

"We're sailing on the *Lusitania.*"

"When?"

"Tomorrow."

"They couldn't do anything to her. She's too big. You'll have some distinguished company."

"Really! I haven't seen the passenger list."

"Why, there's Justus Miles Forman, and Charles Frohman, and Alfred Vanderbilt and I don't know who all. . . . Well," she held out her hand suddenly; "I've chores to do, thousands of them, so good luck to you, and good-by, if I don't see you again."